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INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF ORIENTATION AND DETECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF FIRST-TIME ONLINE STUDENTS ON THEIR SUCCESS RATE IN A COMMUNITY COLLEGE SETTING

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by

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B.A., Central Michigan University, 1980
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A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Doctor of Philosophy in Workforce Education and Development

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Fulfillment of the Requirements

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

REGINALD AKPOM, for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in WORKFORCE EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT, presented on OCTOBER 28, 2013, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

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MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Beth Freeburg, Chair

It is evident that the failure rate is higher among online students than in-class students at Hopkinsville Community College. An analysis of the academic records of students who enrolled in online courses for the first time at Hopkinsville indicated a 13% higher withdrawal and failure rate than those who took in-class courses over the same period between 2000 and 2010. Colleges are taking potentially all of the necessary steps to reduce the student failure rates among online students because high withdrawal and failure rates often reflect badly on the quality of education by the providing institutions (C. Segura, personal communication, November 2009).

The purpose of this study is to determine if there is any statistically significant difference in the success rates between first-time online students who participated in the orientation for first-time online students, and first-time online students who did not participate in the orientation at Hopkinsville Community College. The study also determined if any relationships exist between success in an online course and student gender, student course load, student grade point average (GPA), student age, student readiness for online learning score, and student level of technology experience score. Studying the relationships between orientation of first-time online students and withdrawal and failure rates among first-time online students may lead to finding ways of reducing the high failure and withdrawal rates of online students at the community college.

DEDICATION

To my parents, Hubert and Emily Akpom and to my wife's parents, Felix and Sybil Iwegbu.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of post-secondary institutions that offer online courses, as well as the number of students taking online courses. According to Hoskins (2011), during the Fall of 2009, more than 5.5 million students enrolled in at least one online course, representing a 21% increase over the previous year. According to the Dean of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness at Hopkinsville Community College (HCC) in Kentucky, the 16 member colleges of the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) have experienced a huge growth in the number of online courses that are offered in the public community colleges. Seven online courses were offered in all the 16 public community colleges in 2000, and the number has grown to 572 in 2007, representing an increase of 8071% (L. Angell, personal communication, March 2011).

Community colleges that serve traditional and non-traditional students in a variety of degree programs are actively involved in distance learning programs. Based on data from a recent survey, 76.3% of community colleges offered some form of distance learning courses that reached 83% of the non-traditional (25 years or older) students (Benson et al., 2005). The research study also indicated that 88.6% of the community colleges expected moderate to large increases in enrollment in their distance learning courses (Benson et al., 2005). The increase in online learning is attributed to more traditional students' perceptions of the advantages of taking classes online. In a survey of 50 undergraduate students at Macon State College, GA, it was revealed that there are two primary reasons why students prefer online courses to in-class courses (Cooper, 2001). The first is that the students believed that online classes would eliminate the

need for commuting to school, and the second is that studying online would enable them to maintain their family and other obligations without risk of losing their jobs.

Several research studies regarding online learning have noted that as the number of colleges that offer online courses and programs increase, so do the withdrawal and failure rates among the online students. This is especially true among the students who are taking online courses for the first time. Washington State Community College claimed a successful completion rate of 70% for students enrolled in online courses and 85% for students in in-class courses (Murray, 2001). LeCroy Center in the Dallas Community College district showed an 11% to 15% difference between course completion rates in the district's online and in-class courses in the 18 year history of the online program (Carr, 2000). Colleges reported greater failure rates among students taking online courses than students taking in-class courses (Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003). Since students who fail their courses are more likely to drop out of college than those who succeed in their courses, the challenge for education providers focused on how to retain the students once they have enrolled in the online course (Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003). Diaz's (2002) research study compared the success rate of 135 in-class students to that of 96 online students when success was measured by the percentage of students that attained a grade of "C" or above. The findings showed that while the online students generally fared better overall in their grades, their withdrawal rate was 13.5% versus 7.2% for the in-class students.

Hopkinsville Community College is one of the 16 public community-technical colleges in the Kentucky Community Technical College System (KCTCS). KCTCS was established in 1997 when Governor Patton signed the Kentucky Postsecondary Education Improvement Act to improve the quality of life of Kentuckians by expanding opportunities provided by the state's

two-year colleges (Kelly, 2011). Before the bill was passed, all of the 16 community colleges served as feeder colleges for the University of Kentucky. The Kentucky Postsecondary Education Improvement Act (1997) mandated that each of the community college campuses consolidate with the Career and Technical Education Centers (CTC) that were located in the same city or county. The results of the consolidation are that the KCTCS community colleges now provide opportunities for students to take courses that transfer to four-year colleges, or opportunities to learn employable skills in two years or less that will enable them to join the workforce. Even though all of the 16 public community colleges are under KCTCS, each one reserves the right to create programs where students can learn skills and professions that are in demand in their individual regions or areas (Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, 1997; M. Keim, personal communication, September 2006).

Hopkinsville Community College is located in Kentucky and is home to approximately 3,500 full-time students. The college awards Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees that provide the platform for students to complete their first two years of post-secondary education before transferring to four-year colleges. It also awards certificates, diplomas, and Associate in Applied Science degrees in over 60 careers and technical education fields that prepare students to join the workforce upon earning their credentials. The student body at the community college is comprised of 57% White, 26% African American, 4% Hispanic, 3% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% Native American/Alaskan Native. Nine percent did not declare their ethnicity. In terms of gender, 65% are females and 35% are males. Ten percent of the students are between 18 and 19 years old, 12% are between 20 and 21, and 14% are between 22 and 24 years old. Sixty-four percent of the students are 25 years and older. (L. Angell, personal communication, March 2011). Eighty percent of the students depend on the Pell Grant

(Financial Aid) program for their college tuition and other college expenses such as books, computers and software programs (Y. Eastham, personal communication, October 2013). About a quarter of all the courses that are taught in the community college are taught using the online delivery format (L. Angell, personal communication, March 2011).

The primary reason for offering online courses is to accommodate students whose jobs, driving distances, and family obligations may restrict their ability to take courses that are offered in-class. When Hopkinsville Community College started offering online courses in 1997, only two online courses were offered, and by the Spring of 2007 the number of online courses had grown to 96, an increase of 4,800% (L. Angell, personal communication, March 2011). An analysis of the 2000 through 2010 enrollment record that was provided by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness at Hopkinsville Community College revealed that the failure rate among the online students, especially those taking online courses for the first time, was significantly higher than for students who were enrolled in the in-class courses. The average failure rate at Hopkinsville Community College between 2000 and 2010 was 12.3% for in-class students and 31% for online students.

Many recent research studies have addressed possible reasons why the failure rate is higher among distance learning students than among in-class students, and many more studies have been conducted solely for the purpose of finding solutions for the problem. According to Harrell (2008), an orientation gives prospective online students experiences that mimic online courses, which in turn helps students determine if the online environment is the right fit for them. Motteram and Forrester (2005) described orientation as a series of planned activities that are developed for the purpose of acquainting students with the systems procedures, formalities, and regulations of a particular institution. This is especially true for online students who need to

understand how to transition from an in-class learning environment to an online learning environment.

Online Student Characteristics

Gender, student course load, student grade point average, and student readiness for online learning also impact success in online courses at Hopkinsville Community College. Female students comprised 65% of the 3,500 student body. Females in online classes are likely to be married with children, and it is commonly believed that courses that are offered in distance learning format are suited to women who want to pursue or continue their education while keeping up with their job or family obligations (Gratton-Lavoie & Stanley, 2009; Sen & Samdup, 2009). Online teaching could favor female students who are intimidated in traditional coeducational lecture settings (Gratton-Lavoie & Stanley, 2009; Sen & Samdup, 2009). If female students are those more likely to hold such responsibilities as family, work, and study, then online courses could present a time-saving innovation that would enhance their performance (Gratton-Lavoie & Stanley 2009; Sen & Samdup, 2009). Sullivan's (2001) research study found that of 195 community college online students, 2% of the male participants, and 11% of the female participants indicated that they missed the face-to-face interaction of the traditional classroom. On the other hand, 2% of the males and 6% of the females said that anonymity of being at a distance helped them overcome their shyness, which helped them express their opinions without feeling intimidated by what their classmates would think.

Regarding student course load, Hopkinsville Community College encourages students, especially the ones who are attending college for the first time, to limit the number of courses that they take to four per semester. According to the Dean of Student Affairs, the intent is for the students to have the opportunity to do their class work in and outside of the class and still have

time for other activities and family obligations. Also, no student at Hopkinsville Community College is allowed to take more than six courses per semester unless granted the permission to do so after consulting with the Dean of Student Affairs (J. Warren, personal communication, March 2011).

In their study of 305 community college online course completers and non-completers, Aragon and Johnson (2008) found that students who completed their online courses had a mean GPA of 2.47, and students who did not complete their online courses had a mean GPA of 1.66. The study was consistent with the research study that was conducted at Tidewater Community College, VA, in which it was determined that when a student's GPA was between 2.0 and 3.0, there was an equal chance that the student will be successful or unsuccessful in an online course. The Tidewater study also found that students with GPAs lower than 2.0 completed fewer online classes than those with GPAs higher than 2.0 (Aragon & Johnson, 2008).

According to Harrell (2008), the first step towards increasing online student success is for institutions to determine if potential online students are ready to participate in the online learning environment. In an attempt to increase the success rate of the first-time online students, some colleges are exploring the possibility of using some of the online readiness measuring instruments that are currently available to determine a student's chances of succeeding in an online course prior to enrolling.

Statement of the Problem

Between 2000 and 2010, the failure rate among online students was 31% compared to 12.3% among in-class students at Hopkinsville Community. Many research studies have typically focused on social, institutional, and academic factors that may impact student withdrawal or completion (Newell, 2007), but very few have addressed the impact of orientation

and demographic characteristics on the failure rate of community college students who are enrolled in their very first online course or courses.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine if there is any statistically significant difference in the success rates between first-time online students who participated in the orientation for first-time online students and first-time online students who did not participate in the orientation at Hopkinsville Community College.

The study also examined if any relationships existed between success in an online course and student gender, student course load, student grade point average (GPA), student age, student readiness for online learning score, and student technology experience score.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used to explain and suggest relationships between independent and dependent variables:

1. To what extent does participation in orientation for first-time online students impact their success in the course?
2. What relationships exist between gender and success in an online course?
3. To what extent do the students' course loads impact their success in an online course?
4. What is the relationship between the Grade Point Average (GPA) of a first time online students prior to enrolling in an online course and success in the online course?
5. What are the relationships between the ages of first time online students and success in an online course?
6. What relationships exist between student readiness for online learning and success in an online course?

7. What relationships exist between student technology experience of first time online students and their success in an online class?

Definition of Terms

Distance learning - a learning method in which students can take courses by communicating with their professors synchronously or asynchronously via the internet.

Grade Point Average (GPA) - the result when a student's earned points for all courses is divided by amount of credit hours attempted.

In-class learning/In-class students - a learning method where there is a formal scheduled meeting between the instructor and the students during the semester or session.

Non-Success in online course - a student's final grade is D, E, or W (Withdraw). Hopkinsville Community College uses "E" to indicate a failed course.

Online learning/Online students – a learning method where there is no formal scheduled face-to-face meeting between the instructor and the students. Online learning students in general are required to get their instruction from the internet, do their assignments, and submit their work via e-mail. This is also known as web-based learning.

Online readiness test - a type of questionnaire that is intended to help a prospective online student determine if his or her characteristics are congruent to the skills and abilities needed to be successful in the online learning environment (Harrell, 2008)

Orientation – in this study, two 35-minute online video segments that provide useful information about online courses in general, and about particular online courses

Success in online learning - when a student's final grade in the course is an A, B, or C

Technology Experience Test - a type of questionnaire that is designed to help a prospective online student rate his or her ability to do basic computing and their ability to navigate the web (Harrell, 2008)

Significance of the Problem

It is evident that the failure rate is higher among online students than in-class students at Hopkinsville Community College. An analysis of the academic records of students who enrolled in online courses for the first time at Hopkinsville indicated a 13% higher withdrawal rate than those who took in-class courses over the same period between 2000 and 2010. Studying the relationships between orientation of first-time online students and failure rate among first-time online students may lead to finding ways to reducing the high withdrawal and failure rates of online students at the community college.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to determine if there is any statistically significant difference in the success rates between first-time online students who participated in the orientation for first-time online students and first-time online students who did not participate in the orientation at Hopkinsville Community College. The study also determined if any relationship exists between success in an online course and student gender, student course load, student grade point average (GPA), student age, student readiness for learning in an online learning environment, and student technology experience. The following research questions are provided to explain and suggest relationships between independent and dependent variables:

1. To what extent does participation in orientation for first-time online students impact their success in the course?
2. What relationships exist between gender and success in an online course?
3. To what extent does the student's course load impact their success in an online course?
4. What is the relationship between the Grade Point Average (GPA) of a first time online students prior to enrolling in an online course and success in the online course?
5. What relationships exist between the ages of first time online students and success in an online course?
6. What relationships exist between student readiness for online learning and success in an online course?

7. What relationships exist between a student's technology experience of first time online students and their success on an online class?

The literature review for this study explored the findings of research studies that addressed the issues regarding the failure and withdrawal rates from online courses by community college students. It also addressed the historical background of college courses and programs that are offered in distance learning formats, and the attributes that contribute to student success or failure in online courses. An extensive search of electronic resources was conducted using several databases that included EBSCO and Dissertation Abstracts. The searches were conducted using the following descriptors: community college, online courses, in-class courses, and failure, withdrawal, orientation in online learning, and gender and online learning.

A Brief History of Distance Learning

Distance learning has become an integral part of higher education and is accompanied by a rich metaphoric language with such terms as *"online learning", "e-learning", "open education"* and *"web-mediated learning"* (Cox, 2005). The overuse of those terms does not necessarily mean that everyone understands what they mean, and that is why it is important to address briefly what distance learning or online learning is prior to discussing its history. The United States Distance Learning Association described distance learning as the acquisition of knowledge and skills through mediated information and instruction, encompassing all technologies and other forms of learning at a distance (Bower & Hardy, 2004).

Distance learning course offerings are commonly thought of as phenomena that has permeated our educational system since the early 1990s, but in reality, distance learning has been with us in one form or another since the 1700s. Until the twentieth century, print was the only medium available for distance learning students. Correspondence study, a method of learning

via postal mail, was the first form of distance learning in the modern era. The earliest record of this type of educational opportunity comes from an advertisement in the *Boston Gazette* on March 20, 1728. This was the day when a shorthand teacher by the name of Caleb Phillips offered to send weekly lessons to prospective students who lived in the rural areas and wished to learn shorthand (Bower & Hardy, 2004). Until the early 2000s, many in-class educators viewed distance learning courses and programs with skepticism and expressed concerns about its quality. Some of the skepticism is justified in part because distance learning programs began with rudimentary vocational courses delivered by the postal delivery service. Now, almost all universities and colleges offer distance learning courses and/or programs (Casey, 2008).

There have been three generations of distance learning formats since the 1700s: (a) The First Generation: Correspondence school/study; (b) The Second Generation: Multimedia distance education; and (c) The Third Generation: Computer-mediated distance education. Sumner (2000) noted that though there have been three generations of distance education since the 1700s, there is no clear distinction as to when one ended and the other began.

The First Generation

Around the 1870s, correspondence studies experienced a tremendous growth, which was attributed to a philanthropist Anna Elliot Tichnor, who founded the Boston-based Society to Encourage Study at Home. The goal of the Society was to provide housebound women with courses in over 20 subject areas that they could complete at their own pace (Bower & Hardy, 2004). Foster started the International Correspondence School (ICS) in 1894 to help ambitious coal miners of Pennsylvania gain advanced engineering skills that were required for supervisory positions, and within five years of its inception, the program spread to Mexico and Australia (Bower & Hardy, 2004).

Correspondence schools during the Second World War, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and even as recently as the Persian Gulf War of 1991 made it possible for the students who had to forgo completing their high school education in order to serve in the U.S Armed Forces to earn their General Education Diploma (GED). Earning the GED not only paved the way for the low-ranking soldiers to earn their promotions, it also prepared them to enter the civilian workforce following the completion of their tours of duty (Prewitt, 1998). The concept of distance learning was not new to the U.S Armed Services. They had for years run large correspondence course programs that taught new skills to over 100,000 soldiers per year from the Army Training Support Center in the State of Virginia (Duncan, 2005).

The Second Generation

Using the mail system to deliver lessons to individuals in the first generation of distance learning was extremely valuable to the participants who resided primarily in the remote areas of the United States. As radio transmission became powerful and radios became more affordable, it became feasible to use the airways as a distance learning tool. The use of broadcasts as an educational media stemmed from the need to reach students in the remote areas of the country without having to send teachers to those schools. The unofficial beginning of the second generation of distance learning was in the 1920s when Wisconsin's School of the Air became the first American distance learning program to capitalize on the use of mass media to deliver secondary and postsecondary courses to thousands of students (Prewitt, 1998).

Though the internet has permeated many parts of the world, there are still areas in many developing countries, especially in Asia and Africa that do not have access to electricity. As such, they depend on the battery operated radio to keep up with events that are happening around the world, and they also depend on it to learn the English language (Berman, 2008). A drastic

improvement in broadcast media happened in the early 1950s when the television started to become affordable to the average household and the federal government funded many public television stations across the nation. The partnership between the public television stations and the postsecondary institutions led to a form of distance learning whereby students could opt to enroll in courses that required them to watch the lessons on TV and then reported to campus at specified times to be tested over what they had learned (D. Hoover, personal communication, November, 2009).

The Third Generation

Verbal accounts of events on the radio, and visual and graphic illustrations on the televisions were far more reaching in the second generation than in the first generation but, radio and TV media lacked real-time communication capability; this exists in the third generation. With real-time communication capability, students can watch or listen to the lessons as they are being delivered, and they can interrupt and ask questions as necessary (Noble, 1998).

Distance Learning After the Dawn of the Internet

Distance learning is not new, but the arrival of the personal computer, expansion of the internet, and the willingness of national and regional accreditation agencies to consider non-traditional instruction milieus has encouraged the rapid development of online courses and programs. Also, it is important to remember that the personal computer, which has been critical to the development of internet-based online learning, has only been available and affordable to the general public since the early 1990s (Uhlig, 2002).

The Internet is the latest vehicle through which institutions deliver credit and noncredit distance learning courses to students. Like previous forms of distance learning, such as correspondence school, online learning allows students to do their courses at the times that fit

their lives and schedules. But unlike the previous forms, the internet allows for a variety of synchronous activities such as chat sessions and online discussions. It also provides access to class materials, the latest research, and current news events (Bower & Hardy, 2004). There are two types of online courses: synchronous courses and asynchronous courses. In synchronous courses, online students must log on to the school's website at a set time. Often they interact with their peers and professors via group chat, webinars, phone-conferencing, and video-conferencing. In asynchronous courses, the online students are required to complete and submit all coursework on their own, within the time that is specified in the course syllabus (Lashgari, Talkhabi, & Nazarpour, 2011).

Research Studies on Online Student Characteristics

Several studies that explored the relationships between attending an orientation and succeeding in an online course have been conducted in recent years. Wojciechowski and Palmer (2005) conducted a research study at a small rural community college in western Michigan to determine if there was any significant relationship between the first-time online students who participated in an orientation and those who did not. Seventy-three percent of the 107 who participated in the orientation passed their courses with a C grade or better and only 13.6% of the 17 who did not participate passed. In a qualitative study that was conducted at North Carolina State University, 20% of the 29 participants who were enrolled in online courses and who responded to the survey indicated that, if it were available, they would have taken a course that addressed topics like what to expect in an online course prior to enrolling in their first online course (Bozarth, Chapman, & LaMonica, 2004).

Zhang and Kenny (2010) investigated the variable of gender to determine the success rate of distance learning students at McNeese State University at Lake Charles (Louisiana). Sixteen male and 67 female first-time online students participated in the study, and the findings indicated

that there was no significant difference in success rates between the male and the female students. The findings from Sullivan's (2001) research study of gender differences in the online classroom indicated that flexibility in online classes made it ''easier'' or ''possible'' for students to achieve their academic goals. On the other hand, two out of 38 males (5%), and 18 out of 157 females (11%) indicated that they missed the face-to-face interaction of the in-class classroom.

Aragon and Johnson (2008) investigated the characteristics of online course completers and non-completers in a community college setting. The sample for the study consisted of 305 students of which 216 were females. The percentage of course completion by females was 66% compared with a 52% completion rate by males.

Hsu and Shiue (2005) investigated the relationship between the student readiness for online learning score and the grade point average (GPA) of 126 first-time online students and their success rate in comparison with in-class students. The findings indicated that regardless of the delivery method, the online students performed as well as their in-class counterparts on average. Diaz (2000) compared the successful course completion rate of 69 students who took a course online to the successful course completion rate of 139 students who took the same course in-class. The findings revealed that successful online students were more likely to exhibit a prior college GPA of 2.35 or higher compared to the online students who are maintaining GPA of less than 2.35. Also, 28.1% of the students who successfully completed an online course carried a course load of 12 to 15 credits, or the equivalent of 4 to 5 courses. Only 9.4% of those who enrolled in more than four courses completed an online course.

The Wojciechowski and Palmer (2005) research study that involved 179 students at the community college in western Michigan also revealed that the older the student, the higher the grade in the course. Twelve percent of the participants under the age of 18 passed the courses,

compared to 32% of those who between the ages of 21 and 30. The age of a typical first time college student has changed over the years since the 1970s. In a study of 231 students in a college health education course, Diaz (2000) found that online students were older, and more likely to have completed more college credit hours, than traditional students.

Muse (2003) interviewed 22 randomly selected college students who dropped their web-based courses. The reason most given was that they could not obtain, access, or install the required learning materials in a timely manner. As such, they decided to withdraw from the classes while they still had a chance to do so. Having basic computer knowledge, knowing how to navigate the web, and how to upload or download the required software program are requirements for students who want to enroll in an online course, but they do not necessarily guarantee success in those courses. In a research study conducted by Concannon, Flynn, and Campbell (2005), 85% of the participants who took an online course admitted to having mediocre experience in or extensive knowledge of computer usage and web navigation; the other 15% who were new to using computers soon learned to navigate the web well enough to successfully accomplish their tasks.

Aragon and Johnson (2008) investigated the differences between demography, enrollment, academic, and self-directed learning characteristics of completers and non-completers in online courses at one community college. Sixty-five percent (65%) of the 305 online students did not complete the courses in which they were enrolled. Almost all the non-completers cited personal/time, course design/communication, technology/WebCT tutorial, institutional issues, and learning preference as the reasons for falling behind. Such students are commonly referred to as those not ready for online learning and not having enough technology experience as it applies to basic computer usage (McVay, 2000).

While working with vocational students, Smith, Murphy, and Mahoney (2003) identified the lack of readiness for online learning as the primary reason why students failed or withdrew from online courses. They suggested that online teachers work with students to move toward a position where they could use past experience to develop their own learning strategies.

Current Status and Trends of Online Learning

The university and college communities were slow in embracing courses and programs that are offered using the online learning formats for the simple reason that higher education has a reputation of resisting change. According to Cronin and Bachorz (2005), change is painful and sometimes scorned as evidenced in the 1700s court case when a group broke away from Harvard to form Yale because Harvard grew tolerant of congregational dissidents. Another reason why colleges were slow in embracing distance learning methods of instruction was that critics predicted a future for higher education marked by social stratification and inequality, whereby the least-disadvantaged students in the society may not have access to online resources (Cox, 2005). This prediction did not materialize because the free-market economy is continuously making it possible for computers and internet services to be affordable to the public. Even though the community college educational community has accepted distance learning as part of the pedagogy, there are still some faculty and staff members who believe that online learning is a passing phase that will never replace the traditional classroom (Bower & Hardy, 2004).

In the 2000-2001 academic year, 90% of public two-year colleges offered online courses, and 19% of them had degree or certificate programs designed to be completed totally through distance learning format (Waits, Lewis, & Greene, 2003). In a study conducted by Bradley (2007), about 70% of the surveyed 320 community colleges across the United States reported that they were struggling to meet student demand for online courses, with demand

outstripping supply. The same research study reported that enrollment in distance learning courses at the nation's two-year colleges jumped by 15% between 2004 and 2005.

A research study by the National Center for Education Statistics revealed that 58% of public two year and 62% of four year public universities offered distance learning courses in the Fall of 1995 (Lewis, Farris, & Green, 1997). The research study also revealed that courses in 2-year colleges were designed to train students for employable skills, whereas in the 4-year universities, distance learning courses were designed primarily for continuing education students who wanted to advance in their careers and professions.

Community colleges are actively involved in distance learning programs. Based on data from a recent survey, 76.3% of community colleges offered some form of distance learning courses that reached 83% of the nontraditional (25 years or older) students (Benson et al., 2005). This study also indicated that 88.6% of the community colleges expected moderate to large increases in enrollment in their distance learning courses. It is estimated that the distance learning market is growing 40% annually with approximately 350,000 students, or 2% of total U.S. higher education enrollments (Roach, 2002).

The 16 member colleges of the Kentucky Community and Technical Colleges (KCTCS) have experienced a huge growth in the online courses that are offered in the public community colleges. Seven online courses were offered in all the 16 public community colleges in 2000, and the number has grown to 572 in 2007, an increase of 8071% (L. Angell, personal communication, March 2011). Some factors that led to the increase in popularity of distance course offerings are the mature students' eagerness to return to college to learn new skills or to improve their current skills while still retaining their employment positions, and students' eagerness to accomplish their career goals without having to sacrifice caring for young, elderly,

or sick family members. The researcher's has been teaching Computer Aided Design (CAD) at Hopkinsville for over 20 years, and student records that were kept between 1992 and 2013 show that one of every 50 students who took an online course from the Computer Aided Design (CAD) Department at Hopkinsville Community College had some form of physical disability, and all of them admitted that the online learning format was a major factor in their decision to pursue the CAD profession.

Employees and employers are recognizing that post-secondary credentials are now necessary for entry-level managerial positions and that advancement into upper level and executive positions require advanced degrees (Vroeginday, 2005). As such, the demands for continuing, distance, and online learning continue to grow worldwide as more adults are deciding to pursue advanced degrees and training without having to separate from their current positions in the workforce.

Current Issues Pertaining to Online Courses

Distance learning programs have advanced since the mid-1800s when correspondence schools used to deliver lessons to the students via postal agencies, to the present when live or recorded video lessons may be available to students. The technology that helps facilitate distance learning can also lead to various problems for the providing post-secondary institutions and the online students alike. This is specifically true if the online programs are not properly developed, managed, and delivered (Moody, 2004). For instance, a well-meaning online instructor may present an online course in such a way that the instructions are difficult to comprehend due to the lack of face-to-face communication. Likewise, some students may lack the motivation to log on to the web to do their school work.

Being promoted as *learn anytime, anywhere* courses, the community colleges are using the online course delivery method as a tool for recruiting and retaining prospective students who

would otherwise consider driving distances, their jobs, and absence from their loved ones as hindrances that would keep them from pursuing their educational goals. Colleges, especially community colleges, are converting many of their in-class courses to online courses, and many of them are reporting increases in recruitment, retention, and revenue. To attract students, many of the colleges highlighted the benefits associated with online courses and programs, which include increased access to higher education, flexible location, individual attention from the instructor, and less time devoted to commuting to and from campus (Matthews, 1999). While all those reasons may be true, they tend to mislead prospective students into believing that online courses provide opportunities for an *easy A* (Moody, 2004). Although it is true that an online course probably has a greater flexibility than its in-class equivalent, it lacks the development of social interaction with the teacher and fellow students, which enhance learning in general (Li & Akins, 2004).

Many students give convenience and flexibility as their primary reasons for wanting to take online courses, but evidence suggests that the lack of readiness for online courses and the lack of basic computer navigation skills are the leading causes of withdrawal among first-time online students (Stumpf, McCrimon, & Davis, 2005). While many community colleges have taken the opportunity provided by online learning to grow and expand, their continued success may be in jeopardy because of the high withdrawal rates in online courses relative to in-class courses (Stumpf, McCrimon, & Davis, 2005). Some of the factors that contribute to high withdrawal and failure rates in community colleges include, but are not limited to the fact that taking an online course requires a basic understanding of computers and the ability to navigate the web. As it turns out, some students who enroll in online courses are computer literate and

have the ability to navigate the web, but, they are not comfortable using computers (Kearsley, 2002).

Prospective online students are required to have access to computers that are equipped with powerful processors and high speed internet, which not all students can afford. The Distance Learning Committee at Hopkinsville Community College disseminates the information about hardware and software requirements to prospective online students. As suggested by Floyd and Casey-Powell (2004), many colleges have started displaying on the college home pages all the pertinent steps that will help new online students have a smooth transition into the online learning environment. Unfortunately, some students either neglect the information or fail to follow the instructions (K. Saleeba, personal communication, January 2007).

While community colleges are adapting the internet as a medium for instruction at an increasing rate, many community colleges across the nation are reporting failure rates of over 20% more among online students, than among in-class students. Elgin Community College (Illinois) reported that only 64% of its internet students completed their courses, compared to 83% for the in-class students, and Moraine Valley Community College, also in Illinois, re-examined their online programs following a semester when only 12 of the 40 online English Composition students completed the course (Breslin, 2001). Hopkinsville Community College online students experienced 13% higher failure and withdrawal rates than those who took in-class courses over the same period between 2010 and 2012 (L. Angell, personal communication, January 2013).

Although there are no national statistics to compare withdrawal rates of online students with their in-class counterparts, studies by individual institutions revealed that students in online classes experience higher dropout and failure rates than students in in-class courses. At John

Tyler Community College, Virginia, the course completion rate of online students was 35%, while in-class students maintained a completion rate of 71% (Steinman, 2007). Western Governors University, Utah, reported an 80% completion rate among its online students, and the reason for their success is attributed to the one-month orientation program that all first-time online students are required to attend. In addition, the prospective first-time online students are required to complete a self-assessment of the competencies that they gained through prior work and educational experiences (Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003).

There are some advantages to taking online courses. To name just a few, students do not have to drive to school or live in a dormitory or college apartment. They can balance work with family obligations while pursuing their career goals. According to Galusha (1998), it is clear that not all students have the option to choose either in-class courses or the online course equivalent, but, the possibility exists that some students who have the choice opt for the latter, only to end up withdrawing from the course or courses primarily for the lack of readiness to take online courses. Many studies have cited high withdrawal rate as a major problem among post-secondary students, and many more research studies have been conducted to determine if the problem of dropout among online students can be attributed to any particular behavior or behaviors (Roblyer, 1999). In one of the studies, it was determined that some students enroll in online courses for the wrong reasons. They enroll because they think that online courses will be easier than in-class courses. The realization that online courses require the same amount of work as in-class courses could explain why the withdrawal rate of first-time distance learners is high (Nash, 2005). Unlike an in-class course where the instructor gives the instructions in person, the online students have to log onto the web to download the instructions and study materials. It takes a lot of self-discipline to log onto the web and download the instructions, and not all

students have that discipline and motivation to do so on a regular basis. Some students who are new to the distance learning environment are usually frustrated because there is usually no one around to provide instructions on how to navigate the web. Hara (2000) provided an excerpt of an e-mail that was sent by a first-time online student to his or her professor as documented in a qualitative research study.

> I have spent one hour trying to follow your directions. I am getting an error message. The first time I tried to download it as a zip file, the error says, cannot access this file. I am getting extremely frustrated. (p. 568).

Research on retention conducted at Monroe Community College (MCC) in Rochester, New York, revealed that students came to the online environment without a clear set of expectations and often did not know where to look for help (Gaide, 2004). Many times the questions from the students went unanswered and they slowly fell behind or withdrew from their online courses. As a result, MCC initiated an orientation program that addressed the issues related to student expectations as a means of improving the online learning environment (Gaide, 2004). In addition to improving the online learning environment, the goals of the orientation program are to create a sense of welcome for the online students, to provide an orientation to the course requirements in the academic programs, to advise students about course sequence and prerequisites, and to inform them about how to deal with various administrative issues (Gaide, 2004).

Washington State Community College's online program claimed a retention rate of 70% for all online students and 85% for traditional students who are under 25 years old (Murray, 2001). LeCroy Center in the Dallas Community College District has shown that in the district's 18 year history of the online learning program at that time, the completion rate of the in-class

students was higher than the completion rate of the distance learning students by a margin of 11% to 15% (Carr, 2000). According to Kalher (2002), the completion rates for Brevard Community College (Florida) online courses were 74.5%, while the in-class courses were 84.7%. More often than not, distance learning programs reported higher withdrawal rates than in-class programs, and the challenge for education providers is how to retain the students once they have enrolled in the online courses (Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003).

All the findings so far indicate that the high online course failure rate of the nation's community college students is a significant issue that should be addressed immediately and necessary corrective measures should be taken in order to develop a learning environment where online courses are truly equitable with their in-class counterparts. Some of the reasons for the high withdrawal and failure rates include students' lack of understanding of what taking online courses entails. Many first-time online students at Hopkinsville Community College admitted to choosing online courses over in-class courses because of the catchy radio and television commercials, only to realize that *working at your own pace* was just a slogan that was used for student recruiting purposes (C. Segura, personal communication, October 2009).

It is important that colleges and faculty share part of the blame for the high withdrawal and failure rates among online students. Too often, instructional designers and curriculum developers have become enamored with the latest technologies without dealing with underlying issues of learner characteristics and needs (Sherry, 1995). Besides the cost of technology, there is the possibility that some of the problems may arise from the lack of instructor training in online course management, or the instructor's attitude towards distance learning in general. It seems to be self-evident that instructors need to be trained to use distance learning technology, but too often, they are not (Valentine, 2002).

It is also important that colleges take drastic steps to reduce withdrawal and failure rates among their online students because high student failure or withdrawal rate is perceived as an indication of low quality of education offered by the institution (Thompson, 1999). Because dropping out often has negative implications, many of the colleges now use orientation programs as intervention strategies to help reduce attrition rates among their online students (Brawer, 1996). In addition to providing students the opportunity to experience a simulated online learning environment, orientation can facilitate academic and social interaction, increase student involvement, enhance sense of belonging to virtual learning community, and help with retention (Robinson, Burns, & Gaw, 1996).

In an attempt to reduce the withdrawal rate of the first-time online students, some colleges are exploring the possibility of initiating orientation programs that will be required of every student prior to taking his or her first online course (Cooper, 2001). First-time online students in the Fundamental Computer Application course at Macon State College, Georgia, are required to attend an initial class meeting or orientation during which they meet the instructors and other students, and they also have the opportunity to ask questions. They are also told about hardware and software requirements, and informed of the course expectations and the importance of being self-directed.

Orientation activities can be offered at any time between the enrollment period and the beginning of the class. The format for the orientation activities may include in-class sessions, remote training, or any combination thereof, but, the most important thing about orientation programs is that they make it easy to avoid delays or frustrations that may be caused by inexperience with the new media used for the instruction, and orientation will prepare the participating students for the courses before the actual start date (Scagnoli, 2001).

Kanuka and Jugdev (2006) examined the impact of orientation on students who were getting ready for their first online course. Their findings indicated that intervention (orientation) before the course could increase confidence, academic skills, and time management skills. Athabasca University (Canada) in the 10th anniversary of their online MBA program revealed the helpful practices that helped make their program so successful. Topping the list was that every new online student had to take the week-long orientation course designed to familiarize students with the technology, teach them organizational and time management techniques, and help them develop the confidence in their abilities to succeed in an online learning environment (Jugdev & Hutchison, 2004).

In a study where a group of eight community colleges from across the U.S. cooperated to use the PLATO computer assisted instructional system to teach developmental math to 185 online students, all 185 participants claimed a high level of comfort with minimal anxiety while using computers, internet, and technology resources (Perez & Foshay, 2002). The study also reported that the participants who attended mandatory formal orientation experienced greater ease of initial log-on to the online course portal than those who had no formal orientation session (Perez & Foshay, 2002). The PLATO computer assisted instructional system was developed at the University of Illinois in 1960 with funding made possible from the National Science Foundation (PLATO Learning, Inc., 2005).

Since community colleges have embraced online courses as a way to enhance the educational options for their students and to attract new ones, it is important for them to develop orientation programs that first-time online students should participate in prior to deciding if they should enroll in the online course or enroll in the in-class equivalent (Hyllegard, Heping, & Hunter, 2008).

Theoretical Framework: Constructivism

Constructivism is not an approach to or a model for instructional design, but rather a philosophy of learning based on the idea that knowledge is constructed by the learner through activity (Martens, Bastiaens & Kirschner, 2007). Rovai (2004) defined constructivism as a learning model that is based on the premise that knowledge is constructed by the individual through his or her interaction with the environment. It has its roots in the constructivist movement of psychology. This movement posits that individuals gradually build their own understanding of the world through experience, maturation, and interaction with the environment, to include other individuals (Rovai, 2004). The constructivist approach to teaching and learning is predominant in many colleges today, and the probable reason for the predominance is that constructivism encourages students to develop the learning styles that are unique to their individual characteristics (Gazi, 2011). Teachers are encouraged to start applying the constructivist model when students are being oriented into the course or program. As noted by Gold (2001), the more constructivist the orientation, the more positively the students will view the incorporation of constructivism in the orientation instructions. The constructivist facilitator is less content-oriented and more learner-centered and this gives the students the opportunity to create an information-object rich and socially meaningful learning environment (Gold, 2001).

A constructive learning environment promoting community development fosters a social context in which all members, both students and teachers, are active participants in the learning process. Online learning communities are networks of social relationships, where engagements and interaction are critical factors within a constructivist learning environment (Lock, 2002). In an online learning system, the instructor or moderator communicates with the community of

online learners, and the online community communicates with the instructor or moderator, as well as with each other. Palloff and Pratt (2005) described this learning format as the vehicle through which real learning occurs online. Members depend on each other to achieve the learning outcomes for the course. Without the support of the learning community, there is no online course (Lock, 2002).

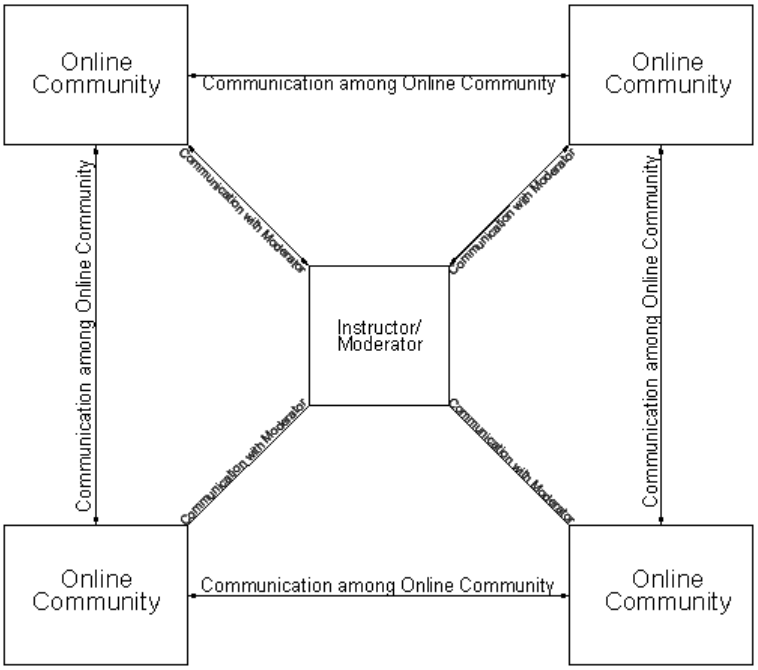

Figure 1.*The Constructivist approach to online teaching* (Researcher rendered drawing based on Lock, 2002).

A constructivist approach to learning is frequently used in the online learning community, and it gives online students the opportunities to understand the topics of discussion in ways that are meaningful to them (Carwile, 2007). For instance, discussion board posts serve as learning artifacts as well as the springboard for more learning, and this leads to the overall development of the online learning community. This constructivist philosophy is grounded in

the theory that actual learning is based on constructing meaning from experience and interpreting the world largely through the social environment (Lock, 2002).

For online teaching to be successful, the online course provider has to create a welcoming environment for the online student community. This is usually achieved through some form of orientation that is designed to facilitate transition into the online learning environment (Gaide, 2004). Orientation activities can be offered at any time between the enrollment period and the beginning of the class, and the format for the orientation activities may include in-class sessions, online sessions, Interactive Television (ITV), or any combination thereof (Scagnoli, 2001).

Summary

Distance learning, which is the process of taking formal courses outside of the classroom or the laboratory, has existed in the United States since the 18th century. The origin of distance learning has been traced back to days when school assignments were sent to the students in remote areas by mail. In the 1940s and 1950s, the radio was the most popular way to lecture to distance learning students; and the 1970s and the 1980s were dominated by television courses. Today, most online courses are offered via the internet whereby students have to log in from their personal computers to access their coursework.

While community colleges are adapting the internet as a new medium for instruction at an increasing rate, many community colleges across the nation are reporting failure rates of over 20% more among online students which is more than among in-class students (Breslin, 2001). The goal of this study is to explore the use of an orientation for first-time online students as a way to increase the success rate of online student success in the community colleges.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter describes the research design and methods that were utilized in the research study. It contains three major sections: research design, quantitative phase, and qualitative phase.

The purpose of the study is to determine if there is a statistically significant difference in the success rates between first-time online students who participated in the orientation for first-time online students, and first-time online students who did not participate in the orientation at Hopkinsville Community College. As listed in the Kentucky Community and Technical College 2011-2012 catalog, successful completion of courses at Hopkinsville Community College is defined as when a student's final grade in the course is an A, B, or C (KCTCS, 2011). In this study, unsuccessful completion or failure is defined as when a student's final grade is D, E or W for Withdraw. Scoring a D grade is not considered a successful grade because four-year colleges do not accept any grades that are less than a C grade towards a transfer student's major program.

The study also determined if any relationships exist between success in an online course and student gender, student course load, student grade point average (GPA), student age, the student readiness for learning in an online learning environment, and the student knowledge in basic computing and web navigation, which is referred to in this study as student technology experience. This research study is guided by seven research questions (see Table 1).

Research Design

A mixed research method was used in this research study. The Phase One quantitative research study targeted 347 first-time online students who enrolled in the 26 online courses offered in the Fall of 2012 at HCC to determine if there was a statistically significant difference

in the success rates between first-time online students who participated in the orientation for first- time online students, and first-time online students who did not participate in the orientation. Phase One also determined if any relationship exists between success in an online course and student gender, student course load, student grade point average (GPA), student age, student readiness for learning in an online learning environment, and student technology experience. The Phase Two qualitative research involved a short follow-up telephone interview of the participants who responded to the questionnaires, and an in-depth interview of four of the first-time online students for the purpose of enriching the quantitative data that was gathered from the completed questionnaire.

Table 1

Research Questions, Variables, and Analysis

Research Questions	Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Analysis
1. To what extent does participation in orientation of first-time online students impact their success in an online course?	Success in the online course	Participation in Orientation	Pearson *r*
2. What relationships exist between gender and success in an online course?	Success in the online course	Gender	Pearson *r*
3. To what extent do the students' course loads impact their success in an online course?	Success in the online course	Course Load	Pearson *r*
4. What is the relationship between the Grade Point Average (GPA) of a first time online students prior to enrolling in an online course and success in the online course?	Success in the online course	Grade Point Average (GPA)	Pearson *r*
5. What are the relationships between the Ages of first time online students and success in an online course?	Success in the online course	Age	Pearson *r*
6. What relationships exist between readiness for online learning and success in an online course?	Success in the online course	Student Readiness Level	Pearson *r*
7. What relationships exist between student technology experience of first time online student and their success on an online class?	Success in the online course	Student Technology Experience	Pearson *r*

Study Population

Hopkinsville Community College is located in Kentucky and is home to approximately 3,500 full-time students (Kentucky Community and Technical College Catalog, 2011-2012). The college provides opportunities for students to earn their Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees before transferring to four-year colleges or universities to earn their baccalaureate degrees. It also awards certificates, diplomas, and an Associate in Applied Science degree in over 16 career and technical education fields that prepare students to join the workforce upon earning their associate degrees. The student body at the community college is comprised of 65% females, 35% males, 57% White, 26% African American, 4% Hispanic, 3% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% Native American/Alaskan Native. Nine percent did not declare their ethnicity.

About a quarter of all the courses taught in the community college are taught using the online delivery format. The primary reason for offering online courses is to accommodate students whose jobs, driving distances, and family obligations may restrict their ability to take courses that are offered in-class. When Hopkinsville Community College started offering online courses in 1997, only two online courses were offered, and by the Spring of 2007, the number of online courses had grown to 96, an increase of 4800% (L. Angell, personal communication, March 2011).

Phase One: Quantitative Phase

The purpose of this phase was to use the quantitative research method to determine if there is a statistically significant difference in the success rates between first-time online students who participated in the online orientation for first-time online students and first-time online students who did not participate in the online orientation at Hopkinsville Community College.

This was also the phase where it was determined if any relationship exists between success in an online course and student gender, student course load, student grade point average (GPA), student age, student score on student readiness for online learning test, and student technology experience test.

Variables and Instruments

The McVay (2001) instrument was used in this study. This instrument was developed in 2001 for the purpose of gauging students' readiness for online learning. The instrument also focuses on student behavior and attitudes as a predictor of success in online learning, and it is used by many colleges that provide orientation for their prospective online students (Hall, 2009).

The McVay instrument is divided into two parts: the *Online Learning Readiness Assessment* checklist designed to assist students to rate their readiness level when it comes to taking online courses, and the *Student Technology Experience Assessment* checklist designed to assist students in rating their ability to do basic computing and their ability to navigate the web. The questionnaire used for the *Online Learning Readiness Assessment test* contained 14 items that were rated by respondents on a 4-point Likert scale, and the questionnaire used for the *Student Technology Experience Assessment* contained 41 items that were rated by respondents on 2-point Likert scale (See Appendix B and Appendix C).

Variable Definition and Sources

This research study was conducted using existing data from the academic records of the first-time online students who enrolled in nine online courses that were offered in the Fall of 2012 at Hopkinsville Community College.

Dependent variable. Successful completion at Hopkinsville Community College is defined as when a student's final grade in the course is an A, B, or C. Unsuccessful completion

or failure is defined as when a student's final grade is D, E, or W (for Withdraw). Scoring a D grade is not considered a successful grade because four-year colleges do not accept any grades that are less than a C grade towards a transfer student's major program (KCTCS, 2011).

Independent variables. Kubala (1998) implemented a form of orientation for online students at the University of Central Florida in Orlando. On the first day of class, all the students drove from various parts of Florida to the main campus for a lecture session, and computer and web navigation demonstration. In addition to developing online course taking skills, the orientation session gave the students the opportunity to talk with their classmates and form a structure for collaborative learning in the future. Orientation may vary from understanding how to access student resources at a distance to understanding how the technology of the courses works, but, the most important attribute of orientation is that it may help the students to become more successful learners (Ludwig, 2002). It does not really matter what method of orientation is used in the institution as long as the goals are to increase students' comfort level with the equipment, to raise students' awareness of their responsibilities as learners, and to involve students actively in the class as they test the equipment and begin to assume the responsibilities of learners (Bergmann & Raleigh, 1998).

Constructive models of learning are exclusively recommended as a guide for the design and delivery of internet-based courses. This model of learning is based on the notion that learners actively construct their own meaning and knowledge from their experiences (Bonk & Cunningham, 1998). In essence, online students must be self-motivated, organized, and task-oriented to succeed (Hale, 2007), but not everyone has that level of discipline. Through orientation, students can determine if the online course is the right fit for them even before enrolling in the course (Harrell, 2008). A study that was conducted among university students

by Lynch (2001) showed a withdrawal rate of between 35% and 50% for online students, compared to 14% for in-class students. In the successive study, when 392 students participated in an orientation for first-time online students, the findings revealed that the attrition rate had declined by 15% among the students who participated in the orientation session (Lynch, 2001).

The Noel-Levitz and the McVay instruments are two of the popular instruments used to predict students' chances of successfully completing an online course. Noel-Levitz, a corporation that markets itself as designer and administrator of predictor tests to prospective online students, specializes in identifying new students' chances of withdrawal based on a logistic regression of previous students' records. Such an analysis uses previous students' entry characteristics (such as sex, previous educational qualifications, age, etc.) to relate to their subsequent success (Simpson, 2006). In 2001, McVay developed a readiness questionnaire that can be used to gauge students' readiness for online learning and students' experience in technology. Commonly referred to as the *McVay Online Learning Readiness Assessment* test, the questionnaire is used for gauging the student readiness level for the online learning environment. It comprises 14 items, rated by respondents on a 4-point Likert scale. The other portion of the instrument, the *McVay Student Technology Experience Assessment* test focuses on the level of familiarity with basic computer usage. The questionnaire for the student technology experience comprises 41 item rated by respondents on a 2-point Likert scale (Smith, Murphy, & Mahoney 2003).

The McVay instrument was chosen over the Noel-Levitz in this research study because it is considered to be more valid and more reliable for the following reasons: A study conducted by Simpson (2006) concluded that the Noel-Levitz prediction of pass/fail is correct in only 65% of the cases. A major drawback to the Noel-Levitz predictor is that it is not often used among

post-secondary institutions in the United States. The *McVay Online Learning Readiness Assessment* test on the other hand is more frequently used by colleges that offer online courses. Smith, Murphy, and Mahoney (2003) administered the McVay instrument to 107 undergraduate university students drawn from a range of courses in the United States and in Australia. Their findings focused primarily on the reliability of the instrument and not on rate of success among the participants. They concluded that in its current form, the *McVay Online Learning Readiness Assessment* test provided a more useful tool for testing student readiness level for learning in an online environment.

Orientation attendance. Traditionally, higher education institutions have developed orientation programs designed to help students make a successful transition to college. Considering the increase in the number of programs offered online, colleges must now design orientation programs suited for students who wish to take online courses (Scagnoli, 2001). Orientation for online students serves the same objective as orientation for students planning to enroll in in-class courses. It can facilitate academic and social interactions, increase student involvement, enhance sense of belonging to a virtual learning community, and help retention of students (Robinson, Burns, & Gaw, 1996). Orientation for online students should give students experiences that mimic online courses.

According to Harrell (2008), through orientation, students can determine if the online environment is the right fit for them. Derby (2007) assessed the relationship between taking an orientation course and student success in obtaining an associate degree within the specified two year time period. Using a sample study of 7,466 students in a Midwestern community college from Fall of 1999 through the Spring of 2002, the findings indicated a high correlation between taking an orientation course and graduating. Also, according to Harrell (2008), after offering a

required week-long orientation *"bootcamp,"* students reported increased confidence level, decreased experience with technical problems, and better preparation to take their first online course.

Gender. Gender was selected as a variable in this study because of the significance of the female student population at Hopkinsville Community College. Females comprise 65% of the 3,500 student body. Females in online classes are likely to be married with children, and it is commonly believed that distance learning courses are suited to women who want to pursue or continue their education while keeping up with their job or family obligations (Sen & Sandup, 2009). Also, taking online courses could favor female students who are intimidated in a traditional co-ed lecture setting (Gratton-Lavoie & Stanley, 2009; Sen & Samdup, 2009).

A small scale research study investigating students' perspectives towards online learning was conducted at Arizona State University in 2010. Twenty-one male students and 14 female students participated in the study. Almost all the students cited flexibility as the best thing about online courses. On the other hand, 10 of the 14 female participants addressed the subject in depth and passionately. They used phrases that evoked family life, family members, and home activities. The phrases included "my children", "my family, "my kids", "something to cook", "stay at home with my children", "finding sitter for my children", "not to sacrifice my family for my class", and "being able to be at home" (Serhan, 2010).

The findings are important in this research study because female students make up 65% of the student population. Forty-four of the 62 students' academic records that were used in the research study belong to female students. (See Table 2). Also, the findings will help the Hopkinsville Community College online course designers to develop courses that meet the needs of all the online students, especially that of the online female student population.

Table 2

Distribution of the Nine Online Courses based on Gender

Online Courses	Number of Female Students	Number of Male Students	Total
BIO 112 – Introduction to Biology	4	4	8
BIO 118 – Microbes and Society	2	2	4
CIT 105 – Introduction to Computing	6	2	8
COM 252 – Introduction to Interpersonal Communication	9	3	12
COM 254 – Introduction to Intercultural Communication	2	0	2
ENG 101 – Writing I	7	3	10
MUS 100 – Introduction to Music	6	0	6
RDG 30 – Reading for College Classroom	5	3	8
SOC 101 – Introduction to Sociology	3	1	4
Total	**44**	**18**	**62**

Course load. Hopkinsville Community College encourages students, especially the ones attending college for the first time, to limit the number of courses that they take to four. The intent is for the students to have the opportunity to do their class work in and outside of the class, and still have time for other activities and family obligations (J. Selbe, personal communication, August 2009). No student at Hopkinsville Community College is allowed to take more than six courses per semester unless he or she has been granted the permission to do so after he or she has consulted with the Dean of Student Affairs (J. Warren, personal communication, August 2009). Diaz (2000) compared the successful course completion rate (C or better) of 69 health education

students who were taking at least one specific online course to the successful course completion rate of 139 students who were taking at least the in-class equivalent of that specific course. The findings revealed that successful online students were more likely to exhibit a prior college a GPA of 2.35 or higher. Also, 28.1% of the students who successfully completed that online course carried a course load of 12 to 15 credits, the equivalent of 4 to 5 courses. Only 9.4% of those who enrolled in more than four courses successfully completed that online course.

Grade Point Average (GPA). In their study of 305 community college online course completers and non-completers, Aragon and Johnson (2008) found that students who completed their online courses had a mean GPA of 2.47, and students who did not complete their online course had a mean GPA of 1.66. The study was consistent with the research that was done in Tidewater Community College, VA, in which it was determined that when a student's GPA was between 2.00 and 3.00, there was an equal chance that the student would be successful or unsuccessful in an online course. The Tidewater study also found that students with GPAs lower than 2.0 completed fewer online classes than those with GPAs higher than 2.0 (Aragon & Johnson, 2008).

Age. When designing and developing online courses and programs, it is important for colleges to consider the various types of learners who will be motivated to enroll in them. Typical online students today are the working persons who wish to upgrade their skill and increase their employment opportunities. There is no substitute for the traditional four years of on-campus life for most 18 – 22 year old student. However, more young people are becoming aware of the opportunities provided by online learning in terms of enrichment, advanced matriculation, and full alternatives to the traditional model (Uhlig, 2002).

Student readiness level. According to Harrell (2008), the first step to increasing online student success is for institutions to determine if potential online students are ready to participate in the online learning environment. In an attempt to increase success rate of the first-time online students, some colleges are exploring the possibility of using some of the online readiness measuring instruments that are currently available to determine a student's chance of succeeding in an online course prior to enrolling in it. In a research study by Aragon and Johnson (2008), 305 students took the Bartlett-Kotrlik Inventory of Self-Learning (BISL) (Bartlett & Kotrlik, 1999) prior to enrolling in the online courses. Yet, 116 (38%) of the 305 online students did not succeed in the online courses. An analysis of the data revealed that there was no significant difference in the BISL score between the students who succeeded in their online courses and those who did not.

Student technology experience. The Student Readiness for Online Learning Self-Evaluation checklist is designed to assist students to rate their readiness level when it comes to taking online courses, and the Student Technology Experience checklist is designed to assist students in rating their ability to do basic computing and their ability to navigate the web. Hall (2011) conducted a predictive validity study which involved 164 traditional and online students in a Midwestern community college using a revised McVay instrument. The findings lead Hall to conclude that the revised *McVay Online Learning Readiness Assessment* test may have some applicability as a counseling tool for prospective students who wish to take online courses.

Phase Two: Qualitative Phase

The goal of the qualitative phase is to understand the impact of participating or not participating in the orientation for first-time online students from their own perceptions. In-depth interviews were conducted with two first-time online students who succeeded in the online course, and two first-time online students who did not succeed in the online course. Each interview was expected to produce about two pages of transcripts which were analyzed and coded using the NVivo qualitative analysis software. The NVivo software is commonly used by scholars in the educational and social science disciplines for classifying, sorting, and arranging qualitative data and it also allows for exploring trends and finding emerging themes (Crowley, Harré, & Tagg, 2002)

Procedures for Phases One and Two

Table 3

Presents the Data Collection for the Quantitative procedure

Participants	Non-Participants
Thirty-one students watched the two orientation videos.	Thirty-one students did not watch the two orientation videos.
Thirty-one students responded to the McVay Online Learning Readiness Assessment questionnaire.	Thirty-one students did not respond to the McVay Online Learning Readiness Assessment Questionnaire.
Thirty-one students responded to the McVay Student Technology Experience Assessment questionnaire.	Thirty-one students did not respond to the McVay Student Technology Experience Assessment questionnaire.
Final grade data was collected at the end of the semester.	Final grade data was collected at the end of the semester.

Table 4

Presents the Data Collection for the Qualitative procedure

Participants	Non-Participants
Thirty-one students received short follow-up phone interviews.	No follow-up phone interviews were conducted
Two of the 31 students were selected for in-depth interviews.	Two of the 31 were selected for in-depth interviews.

In this research study, participants were given a link that they had to log onto to watch two video orientation clips. Three hundred and forty-seven first-time online students were enrolled in the 26 online courses that were offered at Hopkinsville Community College in the Fall of 2012. Israel, (1992) suggested a sample size 78 from a population of 350 for a precision of ± 10%. The researcher used the Urbaniak-Plous Research Randomizer to select half of the 78 or 39 students to participate in the online orientation. The software is capable of generating random numbers by manipulating a complex algorithm (Urbaniak & Plous, 2011).

The 39 students were spread over nine intact online classes. The nine intact classes had a total 47 students who met the criteria. The researcher chose the 47 students because it was extremely unlikely that all the 39 students would want to participate in the online orientation. Finally, 31 of the students agreed to participate in the research study.

The 31 students who agreed to participate in the orientation were subtracted from 347 to get 316. The stratified method of selection was used to select the records of 31 students who were not required to participate. The stratified sampling method was used to ensure that the students in the experimental group and the students in the control group were equally represented in the study. Stratified sampling is a method of selecting a sample in such a way that identified subgroups in a population were represented in the sample in the same proportion that they exist

in the population (Gay, 1996). For example, because six first-time online students in an intact COM 252 class volunteered to participate in the online orientation, the stratified method was used to select the records of 6 students in an intact COM 252 class that are not required to participate (see Table 5 and Table 6).

The 47 first-time online students were classified as the experimental group and they were sent e-mails with requests to log onto a designated website to watch two video clips titled *Orientation of First-time Students to Hopkinsville Community College (Part 1)* and *Orientation of First-time Students to Hopkinsville Community College (Part 2).* The Part 1 video was 35-minutes in length and addressed topics that included what students should know before making a decision to enroll in an online course, as well as the need for online students to be disciplined and motivated, and to avoid temptation to procrastinate. The female narrator talked about how some students choose to enroll in online courses because they think that online courses provide opportunities for an *easy A.* She reminded prospective online students that the burden is on them to get the instructions from the course website, do the readings as required, submit the assignments stipulated in the course syllabus, and take quizzes as called for in the syllabus. Further, she commented that radio and TV commercials that promote online courses do not usually make it known to the audience that students are penalized for assignments, quizzes and tests that are turned in late or not turned in at all. Additionally, she reported that some instructors require their online student to participate in online discussion. The online instructors' role is to provide guidance. Procrastination is the primary reason why some online students fail. Not everyone has the self-discipline to develop consistency in how much time and effort to devote to the course, and such people may be better off in an in-class course. Finally, the narrator

reminded online students that they should have the ability to learn independently since the professor's role is more of a facilitator than a lecturer.

The Part 2 video was also 35 minutes long. The female narrator talked about the importance of being proficient in basic computing and having the ability to navigate the web. She said that online students should be able to download software programs and be able to communicate with the instructor and fellow students as a group or individually. In addition, she reported that online student should be able to create and manipulate files and folders in different formats. Prospective online students were reminded that the worst time to learn basic computing was during the online course.

After watching both video clips, the online students who viewed the videos were asked to provide and submit answers to the *McVay Online Learning Readiness Assessment* questionnaire and the *McVay Technology Experience Assessment* questionnaire. The Likert style questionnaire was designed to provide an indication of each student's readiness level in an online learning environment (OLE), as well as their level of experience in basic computer usage. As an incentive, all 47 students were promised a $10 gift certificate if they participated in the project. Thirty-one (66%) of them responded. The 31students were spread among nine different classes (see Table 5).

Table 5

Distribution based on the courses that the 31 students who were selected to participate in the study enrolled in

Online Courses	Number of Students
BIO112–IntroductiontoBiology	4
BIO118–MicrobesandSociety	2
CIT105–IntroductiontoComputing	4
COM252–IntroductiontoInterpersonal Communication	6
COM254–IntroductiontoIntercultural Communication	1
ENG101–WritingI	5
MUS100–IntroductiontoMusic	3
RDG30–ReadingforCollegeClassroom	4
SOC101–IntroductiontoSociology	2
Total	**31**

It was not possible to fully determine that the participants actually watched the videos and to what extent. The list of the students who were randomly selected to participate in the research study was forwarded to their individual instructors. The primary reason for doing this was to increase the chances that the participants would watch the video clips in their entirety. The instructors were asked to remind the selected students to participate in the study. To avoid perceptions that they were being pressured to participate in the study, the instructors were asked to encourage, rather than require them to watch the videos and respond to the questionnaires.

The control group was comprised of the academic records of 31 first-time online students who were enrolled in the same nine classes as those in the experimental group. (See Table 6)

Table 6

Distribution based on the courses in which the 31 students who were selected not to participate in the study were enrolled in

Online Courses	Number of Students
BIO 112 – Introduction to Biology	4
BIO 118 – Microbes and Society	2
CIT 105 – Introduction to Computing	4
COM 252 – Introduction to Interpersonal Communication	6
COM 254 – Introduction to Intercultural Communication	1
ENG 101 – Writing I	5
MUS 100 – Introduction to Music	3
RDG 30 – Reading for College Classroom	4
SOC 101 – Introduction to Sociology	2
Total	**31**

The control group did not watch the orientation videos and did not respond to the *McVay Online Learning Readiness Assessment* questionnaires and *Student Technology Experience Assessment* questionnaire.

Accessing and Analyzing the Quantitative Data

At the end of the semester, all the instructors submitted the students' final grades to Hopkinsville Community College People Soft Data System. The final grades were submitted

using the A, B, C, D, E, and W format. They were tabulated in a statistical software program where they were categorized and analyzed in terms of the predictor variables that have been identified (see Table 1). The SPSS software was used to analyze the quantitative data. The software package is a comprehensive program that can take data from almost any type of file and use them to generate tabulated reports, charts, and plots of distributions and trends, descriptive statistics, and complex statistical analysis (Cronk, 2006). As part of protecting the identities of the students whose academic records and other information were used in the research study, each student was assigned a unique pseudonym that can be recognized only by the researcher and research advisor.

Correlational relationship analysis was used in the research study because it is designed to identify any relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Gay, 1996). If any relationship is detected, the correlational method can also provide an estimate of the strength and direction of the relationship between the independent and the dependent variables. On a scale between 1 and 0, a result close to 1 will be obtained if a strong relationship is detected, and a number close to 0 will be obtained if the relationship is weak (Gay, 1996). Obtaining a correlational relationship of 1 or 0 in a realistic research study is extremely almost impossible. Hinkle, Wiersma and Jurs (1998) presented a strength measure of correlational relationship (see Table 7).

Table 7

Rule of Thumb for Interpreting the Size of a Correlational Coefficient

Size of Correlation	Interpretation
.90 to 1.00 (-.90 to -1.00)	Very high positive (negative) correlation
.70 to .90 (-.70 to -.90)	High positive (negative) correlation
.50 to .70 (-.50 to -.70)	Moderate positive (negative) correlation
.30 to .50 (-.30 to -.50)	Low positive (negative) correlation
.00 to .30 (00 to -.30)	Little if any correlation

The one specific type of data analysis that was used in the study is the Pearson *r* correlation. The Pearson *r* correlation is used when the two variables to be analyzed are nominal (Morgan, Leech, Gloeckner & Barrett, 2007).

Accessing and Analyzing the Qualitative Data

This part of the research study is to provide a more in-depth discussion about students' experiences in their first online course. To understand the impact of participating or not participating in the orientation for first-time online students from their own perceptions, two students who successfully completed their first online course and two students who did not successfully complete their online courses were randomly selected to participate in an in-depth interview regarding their experiences in their first online course. According to Legard, Keegan, and Ward (2003), personal interviews in this type of research study are valuable because interviews provide the opportunity for more detailed expression and less structural responses, which are not easily obtainable through surveys and questionnaires.

The qualitative phase of the research study was comprised of two sections: a follow-up phone interview of the 31 students who participated in the online orientation, and an in-depth interview of two students who participated in the orientation and two students who did not participate. The decision to have the follow-up phone interview with the orientation participants was made in the middle of research study because understanding the impact of the videos on their first online courses would be integral in the study. The in-depth interview with each of the participants was transcribed and coded with the aid of the NVivo qualitative analysis software. The NVivo software is commonly used by scholars in the educational and social science disciplines for classifying, sorting, and arranging qualitative data and it also allows for exploring trends and finding emerging themes. The two distinct most popular qualitative research software programs are QSR N6 and the NVivo (Crowley, Harré, & Tagg, 2002). Both the QSR N6 and the NVivo facilitate for data management, for coding and for retrieving text, and for theory testing. But the NVivo was chosen over the QSR N6 for this study because based on Paly and Atchison's (2012) evaluation NVivo is the best software for literature review, qualitative research design, data gathering, and data analysis. The software can also analyze different types of data including audio, video, graphics, and text.

The data were placed in categories to find the themes or issues that influenced their experiences during their first college level online courses, and then, analyzed with the NVivo qualitative analysis software. This software was used in the research study because it is the most affordable software package designed primarily for researchers who are conducting qualitative research studies (Lakeman, 2008).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of the study is to determine if there is a statistically significant difference in the success rates between first-time online students who participated in the orientation for first-time online students, and first-time online students who did not participate in the orientation at Hopkinsville Community College. The study also determined if any relationships exist between success in an online course and student gender, student course load, student grade point average (GPA), student age, student readiness for online learning score, and student technology experience score.

Chapter 4 presents the statistical tables and the descriptive results as they relate to the following seven research questions:

1. To what extent does participation in orientation for first-time online students impact their success in the course?
2. What relationships exist between gender and success in an online course?
3. To what extent do the students' course loads impact their success in an online course?
4. What is the relationship between the Grade Point Average (GPA) of a first time online students prior to enrolling in an online course and success in the online course?
5. What are the relationships between the ages of first time online students and success in an online course?
6. What relationships exist between student readiness for online learning and success in an online course?
7. What relationships exist between student technology experience of first time online students and their success in an online class?

Study Findings

The descriptive results are addressed in two phases: Phase 1 – The quantitative data analysis and Phase 2 – the qualitative data analysis.

Phase 1 – The Quantitative Research Data Analysis

Thirty-one first-time online students were randomly selected to participate in the orientation that was designed specifically for students who enrolled in their very first online course at the community college. Another 31 first-time online students were selected not to participate in the orientation. At the end of the semester, the academic records of the students in both groups were analyzed and compared to determine if there were statistically significant differences in the successes in terms of gender, course load, GPA, age, score in the Student Readiness for Online Learning Assessment test, and Student Technology Experience Assessment test.

Table 8

Sample Overview for All Variables

	Successful	Unsuccessful
Successful/Unsuccessful rate among Participants	54.8% (17)	45.2% (14)
Successful/Unsuccessful rate among Non-Participants	45.2% (14)	54.8% (17)
Successful/Unsuccessful rate by Gender (Female)	52.4% (24)	47.6% (20)
Successful/Unsuccessful rate by Gender (Male)	33.3% (6)	66.6% (12)
Successful/Unsuccessful rate by Mean of Course Load	4.13	3.32
Successful/Unsuccessful rate by Mean of GPA	3.17	1.21
Successful/Unsuccessful Mean of Age	28.1	26.6
Successful/Unsuccessful Rate by Mean of the *McVay Online Learning Readiness Assessment* test score	3.9 out of 4.0	4.0 out of 4.0
Successful/Unsuccessful Rate by Mean of the *McVay Student Technology Experience Assessment* test score	2.0 out of 2.0	2.0 out of 2.0

Note. The Non-Participants did not watch the orientation videos, did not take the *McVay Online Learning Readiness Assessment* test, and did not take the *McVay Student Technology Experience Assessment* test.

Each of the variables in Table 6 is addressed in detail in Tables 9 through 15.

Research Question 1: To what extent does participation in orientation of first-time online students impact success in the course? Table 9 shows the breakdown by numbers and percentage how the first-time online students who participated in the online orientation fared when compared to the first-time online students who did not participate. As shown in Table 9, 17 or 54.8% of the 31 students who participated in the orientation passed their first online course, compared to 14 or 45.2% of the 31 first-time online students who did not participate. An SPSS analysis resulted in a Pearson *r* correlation coefficient that is equal to .002. (See Table 9). The

analysis revealed that there was no significant correlation in the rate of success among the first-time online students who succeeded in their first online course and those who did not succeed.

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics for the Rate of Success

Orientation	Successful	Unsuccessful	**Total**
Yes	54.8% (17)	45.2% (14)	**100% (31)**
No	45.2% (14)	54.8% (17)	**100% (31)**

Note. For rate of success, Pearson *r* = .002 (Little if any correlation).

Research Question 2: What relationships exist between gender and success in an online course? Table 10 shows that 24 (54.4%) of the 44 first-time online female students succeeded in their first online course and 20 (45.5%) did not. Six or 33.3% of the 18 first-time online male students passed. An SPSS analysis resulted in a Phi correlation coefficient that is equal to -.187 with a *P* value of .183. This indicates that in this research study, there was no significant correlation between the students' gender and success in their first online course. (See Table 10).

Table 10

Descriptive Statistics for Success by Gender

Gender	Total by Gender	Successful	Unsuccessful	Total
Female	44	52.4% (24)	47.6% (20)	100% (44)
Male	18	33.3% (6)	66.7% (12)	100% (18)

Note. For rate of Gender, Pearson *r* = -.187 (Little if any correlation).

Research Question 3: To what extent do the students' course loads impact their success in the online course? Thirty-five of the 62 first-time online students enrolled in four or five courses, and 22 of them succeeded. Table 11 shows that 11 students were enrolled in zero

courses. These students were enrolled in one or more courses when the data was collected and had to withdraw from the college because of financial or other difficulties. The college's computer system is programed to classify such students as enrolling in zero courses for the semester. An SPSS analysis resulted in a Pearson *r* that is equal to .243 with *P* value of .086. (See Table 11). This indicates that in this research study, there is no significant correlation between the number of courses that the first-time online students enrolled in and whether or not they succeeded in their first online course at Hopkinsville Community College.

Table 11

Descriptive Statistics for Success Using Pearson r, Based on Course Load

Course Load (CL)	Frequency	Successful (S)	(Sum) (CL x S)	Unsuccessful (U)	(Sum) (CL x U)
0	11	0	0	11	0
1	1	0	0	1	1
2	5	1	2	4	8
3	6	5	15	1	3
4	28	17	68	11	44
5	7	5	25	2	10
6	4	3	18	1	6
			Sum: 128 **Mean: 4.13**		**Sum: 72** **Mean: 3.32**

__*Note*. For course load, Pearson *r* = .243 (Little if any correlation).

Note. Zero course load means that the students withdrew from the college after they or their records have been selected for the research study.

Research Question 4: What is the relationship between the Grade Point Average (GPA) of first time online students and success in an online course? As shown in Table 12, 25 or 40.3% of the 62 first-time online students who maintained between a 3.00 and 4.00 GPA prior to the research study were successful in their first online course. On the other hand, only three of the students who maintained between a 3.00 and 4.00 GPA failed their first online course. The SPSS analysis resulted in a Pearson *r* that is equal to .683. (See Table 12). This

indicates that in this research study, there is a significantly high correlation between first-time online students' GPA prior to enrolling in their first online course and succeeding in the online courses.

Table 12

Descriptive Statistics for Success using Pearson r, Based on GPA

GPAs in Ascending Order

Successful	Unsuccessful
1.12	0.00
1.75	0.00
2.00	0.00
2.50	0.00
2.67	0.00
2.69	0.00
3.00	0.00
3.00	0.00
3.00	0.00
3.09	0.00
3.10	0.00
3.12	0.00
3.15	0.00
3.18	0.00
3.19	0.70
3.20	0.86
3.20	1.00
3.38	1.00
3.50	1.50
3.50	1.50
3.50	1.69
3.50	1.93
3.50	2.00
3.58	2.25
3.60	2.54
3.71	2.67
3.75	2.83
3.83	2.91
3.88	3.00
4.00	3.71
4.00	4.00
Sum: 98.19	**Sum: 37.65**
Mean: 3.17	**Mean: 1.21**

Note. For GPA, Pearson r = .683 (high correlation).

Research Question 5: What are the relationships between the ages of first-time online students and success in an online course? The statistical data in Table 13 helped determine if any relationships exist between the ages of the students who enrolled in their first online course and succeeding in those courses. Fourteen of the 31 students in the traditional age group passed their first online course, as did 17 students in the non-traditional age group. The mean age of the students who were successful in their first online course was 28.1, and the mean age of the ones who did not succeed was 26.6. An SPSS analysis resulted in a Pearson *r* that is equal to .165 with *P* value of .247. (See Table 13). This indicates that in this research study, there is no significant correlation between the ages of the first-time online students and whether or not they succeed in their first online course.

Table 13

Descriptive Statistics for Success Using Pearson r, Based on Mean of Age

	Successful	Unsuccessful	Total
Traditional Age (17-23)	14	17	31
Non-Traditional Age (24 and Older)	17	14	31

	Successful	Unsuccessful
Mean of Age	28.1	26.6

Note. For age, Pearson *r* = .165 (Little if any correlation).**Research Question 6: What relationships exist between student readiness for online learning and success in an online course?** As shown in Table 14, 30 of the 31 participants scored four of four possible points in the *McVay Online Learning Readiness Assessment* questionnaire. The SPSS resulting analysis of a Pearson *r* is equal to -.155 with a *P* value of .432. This indicates that there is no significant correlation between the students' score in the *McVay Online Learning Readiness Assessment* test and success in their first online course. (See Table 14).

Table 14

Descriptive Statistics for Success using Pearson r, Based on Mean of the McVay Online Learning Readiness Assessment Average Score of Orientation Participants

	Successful	Unsuccessful
Mean of the *Mcvay Online Learning Readiness Assessment* Test Score	3.9 out of 4	4 out of 4

Note. For Readiness Level, Pearson *r* = -.155 (Little if any correlation).
Note. The Non-Participants did not take the *McVay Online Readiness Learning Assessment* test.

Research Question 7: What relationships exist between student technology experience of first-time online students and their success in an online class? As shown in Table 15, all the 31 participants scored two of possible two points in the McVay *Student Technology Experience Assessment* test. The SPSS result analysis of a Pearson *r* is equal to .239 with *P* value of .220. This indicates that there is no significant correlation between the students score in the *McVay Student Technology Experience Assessment* test and whether or not the students are successful in their first online course. (See Table 15).

Table 15

Descriptive Statistics for Success Using Pearson r, Based on Mean of the McVay Student Technology Experience Assessment Average Score of Orientation Participants

	Successful	Unsuccessful
Mean of the *Mcvay Student Technology Experience* Test Score	2.1 out of 2.0	2.0 out of 2.0

Note. For Technology Experience, Pearson *r* = .239 (Little if any correlation).
Note. The Non-Participants did not take the *McVay Student Technology Experience Assessment* test.

Phase 2 – The Qualitative Research Data Analysis

The qualitative phase of the research study was comprised of two sections: a short follow-up phone interview of the 31 students who participated in the orientation, and an in-depth interview of two students who participated in the orientation and two students who did not participate.

In the short follow-up phone interview, the 31 students were asked how relevant the online videos were in preparing them for the first online course. Twenty-seven (87.1%) of them responded that the videos prepared them for what to expect in an online course, and four (12.9%) responded that they could have succeeded in their first courses without having watched the videos.

For the in-depth interview, two students who participated in the online orientation and two students who were selected not to participate in the online orientation were randomly selected to be interviewed as a part of this research study. The selection of two females and two males that met the criteria was done with the Urbaniak-Plous Research Randomizer (UPRR) software program. One of the females refused to be interviewed. After several failed attempts to select the interviewees with the random sampling method, the researcher used the sample of convenience method to get four interviewees who met the criteria. They comprised of one female student and three male students.

The following students participated in the in-depth interview: Ms. M who was selected not to participate in the online orientation and succeeded in her first online course, Mr. J who participated in the online orientation and succeeded in his first online course, Mr. C who was selected not to participate in the online orientation but did not succeed in his first online course,

and finally, Mr. D who participated in the online orientation but did not succeeded his first online course.

The in-depth interviews took place at the end of the fall semester after all grades had been turned in, and the tape recorded data was transcribed. The researcher made sure that the interviewees understood what was in the consent form. He also reminded each of them that the interviews would be recorded in audio format, and that they had the right to terminate the interview without fear of retribution. The interview questions focused primarily on student motivation and preparedness to take online courses, as well as their experiences in the online course. Each of the four students was interviewed for a maximum of 20 minutes.

Lao and Gonzales (2005) conducted a study to find out the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of professors and students about teaching and learning in a distance learning environment using a web-based course delivery method.

The following open ended questions that are based on Lao and Gonzales (2005) model for conducting in-depth interviews in a qualitative research study were asked in the in-depth interviews with each of the four students.

1. What were the parts of the course that made it easy to follow and complete assignments?
2. What challenges did you encounter before and during the online course?
3. Was the online course format effective?
4. What aspects of the online course format were not effective?
5. What corrective actions would you suggest for the aspects that were not effective?
6. Overall, what are your reflections on the course content?
7. How relevant was the orientation to the course format and course content?

The interview with each of the participants was transcribed and coded with the aid of the NVivo qualitative analysis software. The NVivo software is commonly used by scholars in the educational and social science disciplines for classifying, sorting, and arranging qualitative data and it also allows for exploring trends and finding emerging themes (Crowley, Harré, & Tagg, 2002). The data were placed in categories to find the themes or issues that influenced their experiences during their first college level online courses and then analyzed with the NVivo qualitative analysis software.

The emerging themes from each participant's transcript fell into two broad categories: Likes about online courses, and dislikes about online courses. Likes about online courses included: *well organized; effective;* and *I am disciplined to know when to stop everything and do my schoolwork.* Dislikes about online courses included: *lack of immediate feedback from the instructor*; *weak or no Internet reception in the rural area*; *Blackboard and WEB being down at the most inappropriate time*; and *online classes are good, but nothing is better than having an instructor in class.*

Findings

The evaluation of the interview transcripts for each of the participants in the in-depth interviews and the analysis of the NVivo data produced expected and unexpected results. One of the expected results was that all the participants responded to question 6 in more detail than questions 1 through 5.

Interview question 6 "Overall, what are your reflections on the course content?" was presented in the format that was suggested by Marschan-Piekkari and Welch (2004). Often, interesting information will come when the interview is finishing. This is usually when the

participants tend to relax and comment on earlier responses, as well as to tell you what they missed (Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2004).

The unexpected and surprising finding as indicated in the NVivo analysis was that, even though all the participants reported their first online course experience as positive, there were more things they disliked about online courses than they liked. (See Figures 2 through 5). By its nature, qualitative research lends itself to unexpected findings, some of which may be very surprising to the analyst (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

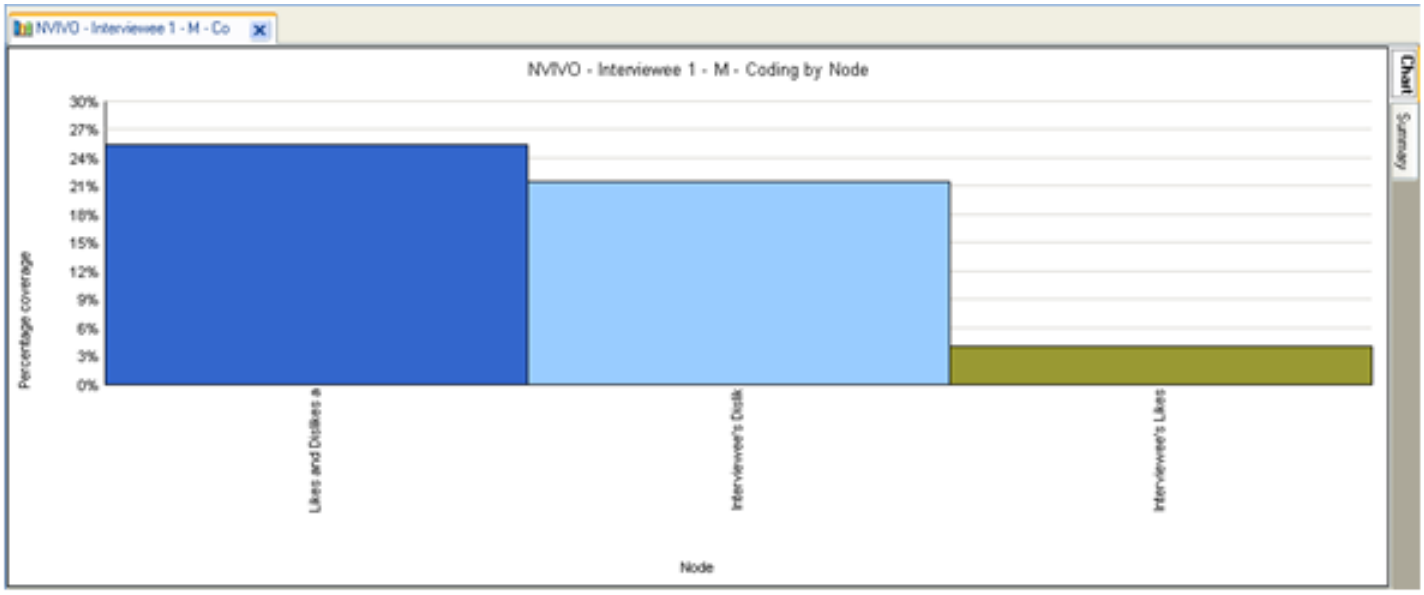

Figure 2. The NVivo analysis showing that 21.47% of Ms. M's (Interviewee 1) responses fell in the "Dislike" category (light blue), and that 3.99% of her responses fell in the "Like" category (olive green).

Ms. M. did not participate in the online orientation, and she scored a "B" in the course. She was aware that there was a possibility that something may go wrong during the semester, such as Blackboard might stop working in the middle of a quiz. When she was asked about any challenges that she may have encountered before and during the online course, she responded in this manner:

Eh, always Blackboard, because a couple of times I was taking a quiz and they might not have always been timed but they are pretty long quizzes, 65-70 answer questions and you have to struggle to get it done, make sure you know the information and get the answers in. If I was taking it here or at home, Blackboard can always stop working, or just go out, pages not responding. So I have to stop and I have to call them to reset the quiz. Even though Blackboard disrupted it, it will still conclude that I didn't finish it, and that will be final score.

On the positive side, Ms. M thought she succeeded in her first online course because she had always been good with time management.

I kind of know when to set aside some time to do my school work. Through my week, I say this is when I am going to do Biology, and this day is when I am going to do this part of it. It is kind of how I do my whole class schedule. One thing that I could not understand was why it usually took a long time for the online instructor to respond to my questions in a timely manner.

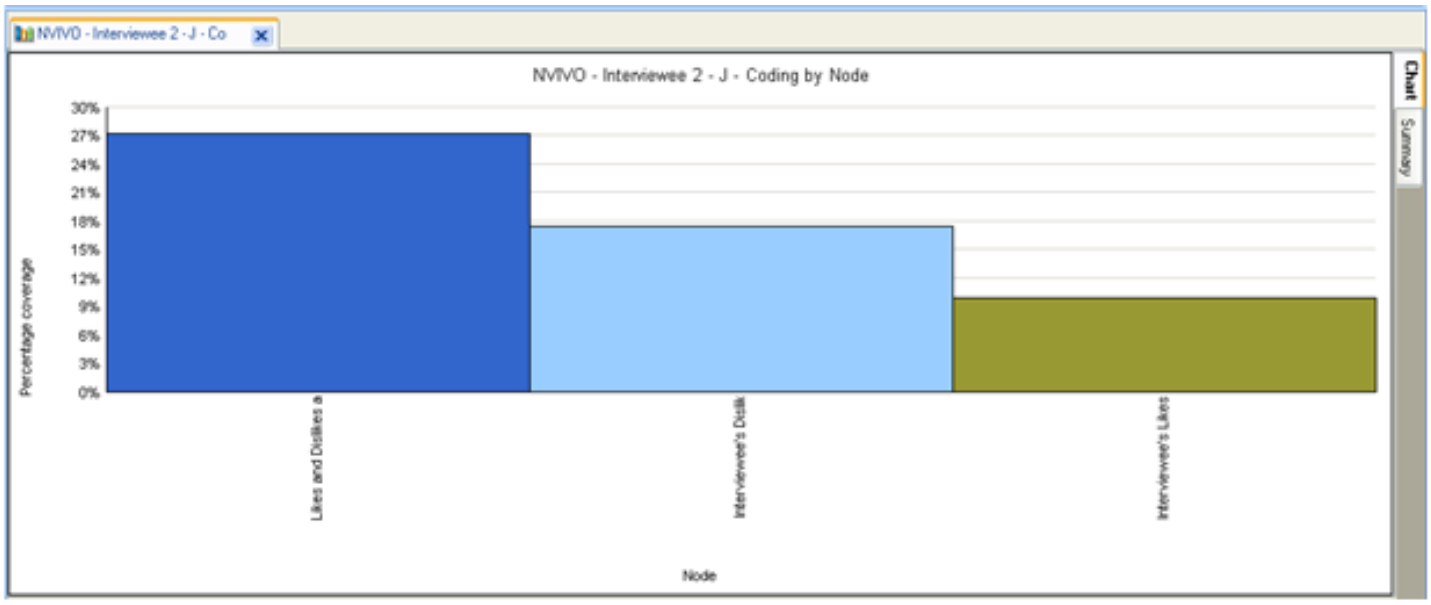

Figure 3. The NVivo analysis showing that 17.40% of Mr. J's (Interviewee 2) responses fell in the "Dislike" category (light blue), and that 9.84% of his responses fell in the "Like" category (olive green).

Mr. J participated in the online orientation and he passed his first online course with an "A" grade. He was impressed that the online instructor was very organized and "*She provided us with a list of when everything was supposed to be completed, and so it is really easy to stay on track*". Also, in regards to the online orientation, he further reported that,

> *The video about taking online classes that we watched before the beginning of the semester did not teach me anything new. As an older student, I have about enough life experience to know when to stop everything and do my online school work, and not to wait until close to the deadline. Heck, I was more worried about my internet failing me at the worst possible time because I live in a remote area where Internet reception is really weak.*

In the follow-up phone interview, Mr. J insisted that the videos about taking online classes that they watched before the beginning of the semester did not teach him anything new.

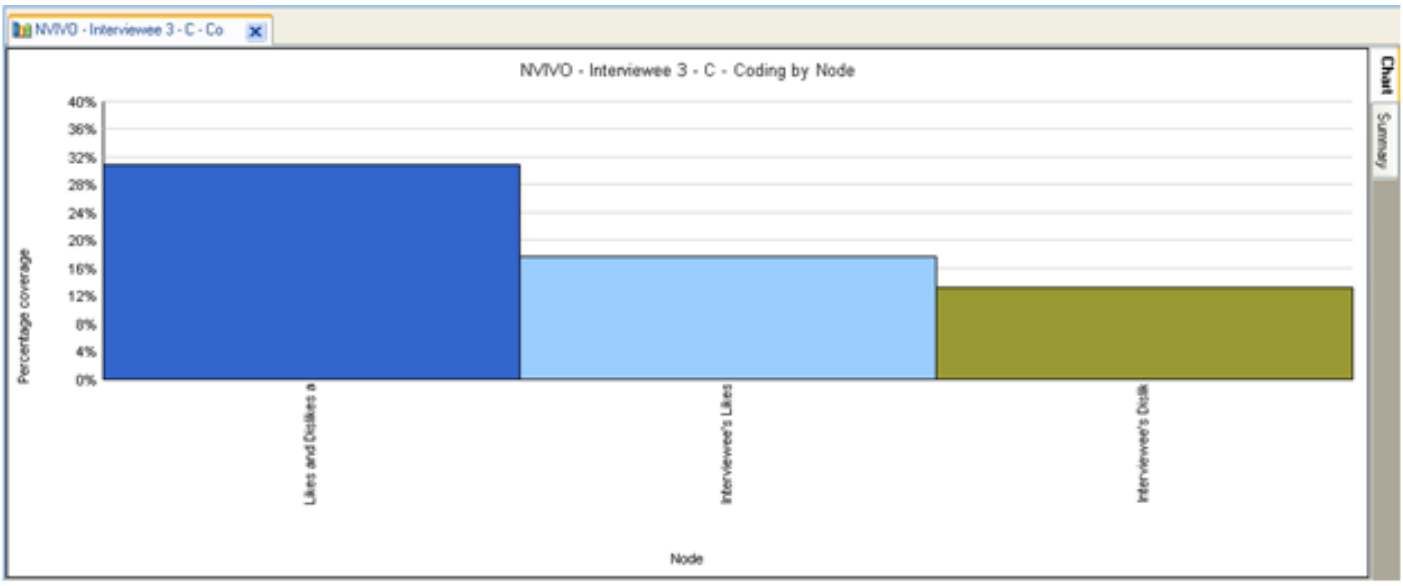

Figure 4. The NVivo analysis showing that 13.15% of Mr. C's (Interviewee 3) responses fell in the "Dislike" category (light blue), and that 17.12% of his responses fell in the "Like" category (olive green).

Mr. C did not participate in the orientation, and he did not succeed in his first online course. He had to withdraw from all his classes because he had to undergo a major surgery. Despite the setback, he likes everything about online classes and plans to take more courses online whenever the opportunity arises. He thought he would have succeeded in his first online if it was not for the major surgery.

> *What made it easy is that they had the whole semester planned out from the beginning and they had all when your homework was due, the day of the test ahead of time. Like I say, I had to go somewhere and I didn't know if I was going to be near a computer I can get my homework done ahead of time. I had access to do it.*

Mr. C also hopes that the instructors will get better at responding to students' e-mails in a timely manner.

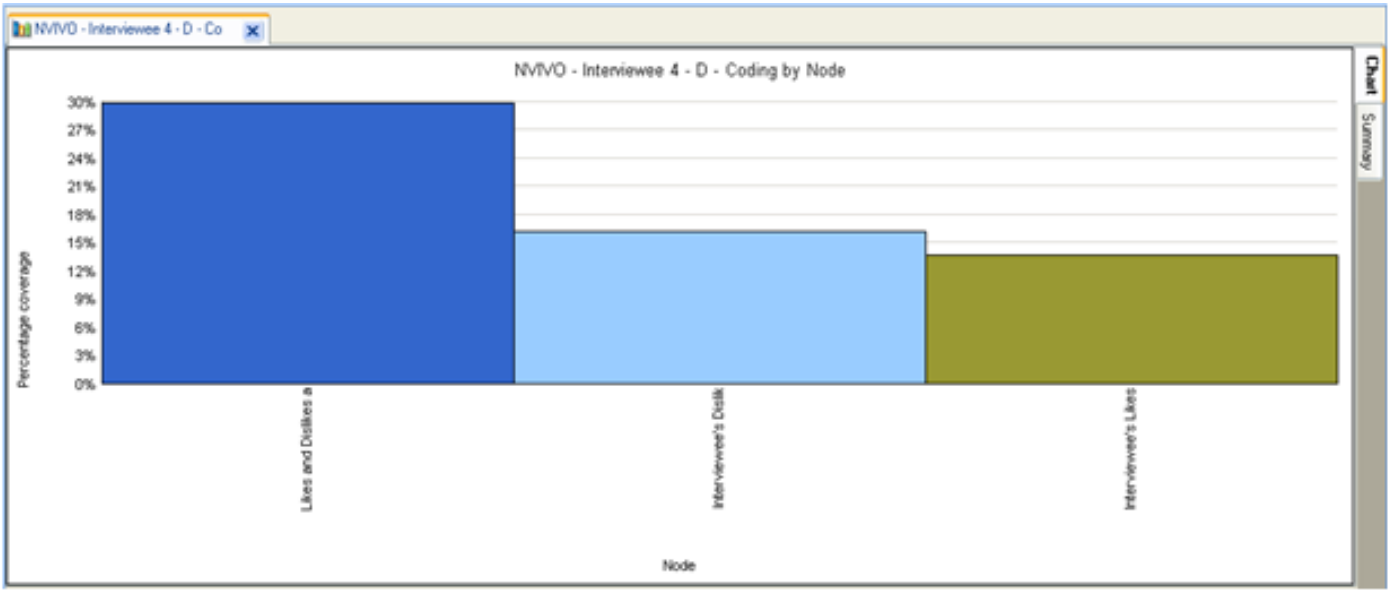

Figure 5. The NVivo analysis showing that 16.21% of Mr. D's (Interviewee 4) responses fell in the "Dislike" category (light blue), and that 13.64% of his responses fell in the "Like" category (olive green).

Mr. D participated in the online orientation and did not succeed in the online course. He was happy that taking online courses gave him the flexibility to go to work during the day and work on his online course at night. Even though he enjoyed his first online course experiences, inwardly, he thinks online courses are not as effective as he would like them to be. *I think the in-class class is more effective because of the interaction I get with the teacher. I get a one-on-one interaction with the teacher, which I did not get in my online class.*

In the follow-up phone interview, Mr. D claimed that the videos he was required to watch as part of the orientation helped prepare him for what to expect.

He scored a "D" in the course and felt he could have done better if he took the course in an in-class format. Nevertheless, the overall tone of his voice indicated that he was satisfied with a "D" grade. I could tell that it did not occur to him that even though a "D" is a passing grade in the community college level, the course is not transferable should he decide to go for his

bachelor's degree in a four-year college or university. Also, a "D" is considered a failing grade for the purpose of this research study.

Summary

In this chapter, the quantitative research method was used to determine if there is a statistically significant difference in the success rates between first-time online students who participated in the orientation for first-time online students and first-time online students who did not participate in the orientation. It was also determined if any relationship exists between success in an online course and student gender, student course load, student grade point average (GPA), student age, student score on student readiness for online learning test, and student technology experience test. It was also in this chapter that the qualitative research method was used to determine the themes or issues that influenced the participants' experiences during their first college level online courses at Hopkinsville Community College. The analysis that led to the findings in the quantitative phase was conducted with the aid of the SPSS statistical software. Descriptive statistics which included averages, percentages, and Pearson *r* were used to present the findings for each of the research questions.

In the qualitative phase of the study, the interview transcripts were analyzed with the aid of the NVivo qualitative analysis software, which helped determine the themes or issues that influenced the participants' experiences during their first college level online course. The goal of the qualitative phase is to understand the impact of participating or not participating in the orientation for first-time online students from their own perceptions. In-depth interviews were conducted with two first-time online students who succeeded in the online course, and two first-time online students who did not succeed in the online course. Each interview was expected to

produce about two pages of transcripts which were analyzed and coded using the NVivo qualitative analysis software

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, FURTHER INSIGHTS INTO FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The preceding chapters have focused on the needs and the rationales for this research study, a review of related literature, research methods, and the results of the study. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the major findings for each of the research questions, and then, conclusions, and recommendations.

The rationale for the study is that the withdrawal and failure rates are higher among online students than in-class students at Hopkinsville Community College. An analysis of the academic records of students who enrolled in online courses for the first time at Hopkinsville indicated a 13% higher withdrawal rate than those who took in-class courses over the same period between 2000 and 2010 (L. Angell, personal communication, March 2011). Studying the relationships between orientation of first-time online students and failure rate among first-time online students may lead to finding ways to reduce the high withdrawal rate and increase the graduation rate of online students at the community college.

The purpose of this study was to determine if there were any statistically significant difference in the success rates between first-time online students who participated in the orientation at Hopkinsville Community College for first-time online students and first-time online students who did not participate in the orientation. The study also determined if any relationships exist between success in the online course and gender, success in the online course and student course load, success in the online course and grade point average (GPA), success in the online course and student age, success in the online course and Student Online Learning

Readiness for Online Assessment test and success in online course Student Technology Experiences Assessment test.

The following research questions are provided to explain and suggest relationships between independent and dependent variables:

1. To what extent does participation in orientation of first-time online students impact success in the course?
2. What relationships exist between gender and success in the online course?
3. To what extent does the student's course load impact their success in an online course?
4. What is the relationship between the Grade Point Average (GPA) of a first time online students prior to enrolling in an online course and success in the online course?
5. What are the relationships between the ages of first time online students and success in an online course?
6. What relationships exist between student readiness for online learning and success in the online course?
7. What is the relationship between a student's technology experience of first time online students and their success in the online class?

Discussion

The experimental group was the 31 first-time online students who were randomly selected from 347 first-time online students to watch two thirty-five minute long online video clips entitled *Orientation of First-time Students to Hopkinsville Community College (Part 1)* and *Orientation of First-time Students to Hopkinsville Community College (Part 2).* The first part addressed topics that included what students should know before making a decision to enroll in

an online course, as well as the need for online students to be disciplined, motivated, and to avoid temptation to procrastinate. The second part addressed the role of the online students and the role of the instructor.

After watching the videos, the experimental group of online students was required to provide and submit their responses to the accompanying *McVay Online Learning Readiness Assessment* test and *Student Technology Experience Assessment* questionnaires. The Likert style questionnaire was designed to provide an indication of each student's readiness level in an online learning environment (OLE), as well as the student's ability to do basic computing and their ability to navigate the web.

The control group was comprised of the academic records of thirty-one first-time students who were enrolled in the same nine classes as those in the experimental group. The control group did not watch the orientation videos and did not respond to the *McVay Online Learning Readiness Assessment* test and *Student Technology Experience Assessment* questionnaires. The 31 students' records were selected from a population of the remaining 316 students using the stratified sampling method. Using the stratified method helped to ensure that the students in the experimental group and the student control group were equally represented in the study.

At the end of the semester, all the instructors submitted the students' final grades to Hopkinsville Community College People Soft Data System. The final grades were submitted using the A, B, C, D, E and W format. The grades and other demographic variables were recorded in Hopkinsville Community College People Soft Data System. They were then tabulated and analyzed with the SPSS in a statistical software program. Two first-time online students who participated in the online orientation and two first-time online students who did not participate were interviewed for the purpose of providing a more in-depth discussion about

students' experiences in their first online course. To understand the impact of participating or not participating in the orientation for first-time online students from their own perceptions, two students who successfully completed their first online course and two students who did not successfully complete their online courses were randomly selected to participate in an in-depth interview regarding their experiences in their first online course. The transcripts of the audio-taped interviews were analyzed with the aid of the NVivo qualitative analysis software program.

The findings of the study are based on the seven research questions that guided the study:

Research Question 1: To what extent does participation in orientation of first-time online students impact success in the course?

Seventeen of the 31 students who participated in the orientation passed their first online course, compared to 14 of the 31 first-time online students who did not participate. The analysis revealed that there was no significant correlation in the rate of success among the first-time online students who succeeded in their first online course and those who did not succeed. The findings for Research Question 1 are not consistent with the Wojciechowski and Palmer (2005) research study at a community college in western Michigan, which was designed to determine if there was any significant relationship between the first-time online students who participated in an orientation and those who did not. In that study, 73% of the 107 who participated in the orientation passed their courses with C grade or better and only 13.6% of the 17 who did not participate passed. One possible reason for the difference in the findings may be due to the sample size. The Wojciechowski and Palmer (2005) sample size was 179 compared to the sample size of 62 that was used in this research study.

Research Question 2: What relationships exist between gender and success in an online course?

Twenty-four of the 44 first-time online female students succeeded in their first online course and 20 did not. Six of the 18 first-time online male students passed. The analysis indicated that in this research study, there was no significant correlation between the students' gender and success in their first online course. The findings support Aragon and Johnson's (2008) investigation of differences between online course completers and non-completers in a community college setting. The sample for their study consisted of 305 students of which 216 were females. The percentage of course completion by females was 66% compared with a 52% completion rate by males.

Research Question 3: To what extent do the students' course loads impact their success in an online course?

Twenty-one (67.7%) of the 31 first-time participants who enrolled in four or five courses succeeded in their first online course. An SPSS analysis revealed there is no correlation between the number of courses in which the first-time online students enrolled and whether or not they succeed in their first online course. The findings support the Diaz's (2000) research study which revealed that 28.1% of the students who successfully completed an online course carried a course load of 12 to 15 credits, or the equivalent of three to four courses. Only 9.4% of those who enrolled in more than four courses completed an online course.

Research Question 4: What is the relationship between the Grade Point Average (GPA) of first time online students and success in an online course?

Twenty-five of the 62 first-time online students who maintained between a 3.00 and 4.00 GPA prior to the research study were successful in their first online course. On the other hand,

only three of the students who maintained between a 3.00 and 4.00 GPA failed their first online course. The findings support Diaz's (2000) research study of 231 students in a college health education course. The findings revealed that successful online students exhibited a higher average GPA prior to enrollment in the online course. The average GPA for the successful students was 3.02 compared to that of the unsuccessful students which was 2.25. Diaz noted that one possible reason for this was that students who had previously completed some in-class courses prior to enrolling in online courses were well suited to the independent self-directed study associated with distance learning.

Research Question 5: What are the relationships between the ages of first time online students and success in an online course?

Fourteen of the 31 students in traditional college student age group (17-23) passed their first online course, as did 17 students in the non-traditional age group (24 and older). The results of the data indicated that there is no significant correlation between the ages of the first-time online students and whether or not they succeed in their first online course. The finding is inconsistent with the Wojciechowski and Palmer (2005) research study that involved 179 online students. The study showed that 25% of the participants under the age of 18 passed their online courses, compared to 32% of those between the ages of 21 and 30.

Halsne and Gatta's (2002) research study consisted of 1,642 students who were enrolled in an online course. One of the major findings was that the average age of the online student was 25 years old. There is no data to support this, but it is likely that the reason for the inconsistence may be that the average age of online student is now lower than it was in 2002 with the surge of ipad, smart phones, and tablets. Many young students can access such devices to learn how to navigate the web, Blackboard or other portals used by the college. But knowing how to navigate

the web and Black Board does not necessarily translate into success because according to Moody (2004), some students may lack the motivation to log on to the web to do their school work.

Research Question 6: What relationships exist between student readiness for online learning and success in an online course?

Of the students who were randomly selected to participate in the online orientation, all but one of the 31 students scored the highest point of 4 in the *McVay Online Learning Readiness Assessment* test. The analysis indicated that there is no correlation between the students score in the *McVay Online Learning Readiness Assessment* test and success in their first online course. This finding is consistent with that of Aragon and Johnson (2008).

In the Aragon and Johnson research study, 305 participants completed the Bartlett-Kotrlik Inventory of Self-Learning (BISL) prior to enrolling in online courses. Sixty-five percent of the 305 online students did not succeed in the online courses. BISL is another self-assessment tool that does the same function as the *McVay Online Learning Readiness Assessment* test. An analysis of the data revealed that there was no significant difference in the BISL score between the students who succeeded in their online courses and those who did not. Almost all the non-completers cited personal/time, course design/communication, technology/WebCT tutorial, institutional issues, and learning preference as their reasons for not completing the online courses and these reasons essentially amount to not being ready for the online learning environment. One way for community colleges to increase online course completion is to establish orientation programs that are similar to the one used by some departments at Macon State College, Georgia. There, first-time online students in the Fundamental Computer Application course are required to attend an initial class meeting or orientation during which they meet the instructors and other students, and they also have the

opportunity to ask questions. They are also told about hardware and software requirements, and informed of the course expectations and the importance of being self-directed.

Research Question 7: What is the relationship between student technology experience of first-time online students and their success in an online class?

Of the 31 students who were randomly selected to participate in the online orientation, all but one of the 31 students scored the highest point of 2 in the *McVay Student Technology Experience Assessment* test, and the findings revealed that there is no statistically significant difference between the students' online readiness score and whether or not they succeeded in the online courses. This finding is also consistent with that of Aragon and Johnson (2008). Aragon and Johnson's study revealed that 65% of 305 online students did not complete the courses they were enrolled in because of their lack of experience in technology which includes basic computer usage. One possible reason for the consistency in the findings can be attributed to affordable hand-held computers like ipads, iphones, and tablets that have flooded the market since 2009. These devices make it possible for students to be proficient in basic computing while they are still in high school.

Further Insights into the Findings

The findings from the qualitative analysis produced mixed results. The participants spoke favorably about their experiences in their first online course but the analysis of the qualitative data indicated that there were more things that they disliked about the online courses than things they liked. As expressed by Mr. D, "*I think the in-class class is more effective because of the interaction I get with the teacher. I get a one-on-one interaction with the teacher, which I did not get in my online class".*

According to Mr. C,

> *If there is one thing that I don't like about online courses, it is that students are left to do all the work. Don't get me wrong, I like to read, but there are at times when you need to talk to the instructor but they are not available.*

Mr. C, like many first-time online students, realized that although it is true that an online course probably has a greater flexibility than its in-class equivalent, it lacks in the development of social interaction with the teacher and fellow students, which enhance learning in general (Li & Akins, 2004). Also, many students are now realizing that many colleges highlight the benefits associated with Internet instruction, which include increased access to higher education, flexible location, and individualized attention from the instructor, and less time devoted to commuting to and from campus (Matthews, 1999). Little is mentioned about the fact that the online student has to do most of the work in order to succeed in an online course.

In the follow-up phone interview of the 31 students who participated in the orientation, more than 90% of them claimed that the two 35-minute orientation videos actually prepared them for what to expect in their first online course. Two of the participants were impressed that the online orientation helped them realize that they do not belong in online classes because they do not have the self-discipline that it takes to succeed in an online course. They also appreciated the fact that they were able to switch to the in-class version of the same course before the end of the drop-and-add period. Though the two students were classified as Unsuccessful in the research study, the SPSS analysis of the data indicated no significant changes from the previous results.

Implications and Recommendations for Theory

Having the ability to use the online orientation as a tool for preparing oneself for what to expect in an online course, or for deciding whether to remain in an online class or to switch to the in-class equivalent is a practical example of constructivist approach to learning. Constructivist philosophy is grounded in the theory that actual learning is based on constructing meaning from experience and interpreting the world largely through the social environment (Lock, 2002). A constructivist approach to learning is frequently used in the online learning community, and it gives online students the opportunities to understand the topics of discussion in ways that are meaningful to them (Carwile, 2007). For online teaching to be successful, the online course provider has to create a welcoming environment for the online student community. This is usually achieved through some form of orientation that is designed to facilitate transition into the online learning environment (Gaide, 2004). There was one major limitation with the streaming videos that the participants watched. The videos were presented in the format in the students just had to watch without any interaction or engagement, students have to be engaged to make meaning out of the orientation. It is thus recommended that future videos be designed in such ways that participants have to stop at intervals to respond to different scenarios that are presented by the narrator.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

In the research study, 25 the 62 first-time online students who maintained between a 3.00 and 4.00 GPA prior to the research study were successful in their first online course, and 28 of those who maintained GPAs below 3.00 failed. Jackman and Swan (2000) suggest that a significant of this magnitude may require that further researches to be conducted to determine if there are learning style differences for those who are enrolled in online courses versus those

enrolled in in-class courses. Knowing that weaker students tend to not perform well, prerequisites for online courses should be established and strictly followed. Some community colleges may want to consider a certain level of performance in prerequisite courses, college-entry test score, or a minimum GPA that students have to maintain in order to be eligible to enroll in online courses (Jost, Rude-Parkins, & Githens, 2012).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Analysis of six of the seven research questions indicated no significant relationship or correlation between participation in the orientation for first-time online students and success in the first-time course. In addition, the students' gender was not found to be significantly correlated with success in the students' first online course. The number of courses that the first-time online students enrolled in was not found to be significantly correlated with whether or not they succeeded in their first online course. This study also found no correlation between the ages of the first-time online students and whether or not they succeeded in their first online course. Finally, no correlation was found between the students score in the *McVay Online Learning Readiness Assessment* test and success in their first online course, and between the students score in the *McVay Technology Experience* test and whether or not the students were successful in their first online course. The only research question in the study that showed significant correlation was the one that addresses the relationship between the students' GPAs and success in their first online course. The relationship was such that many more students who maintained a GPA of between 3.00 and 4.00 prior to enrolling in their first online course succeeded than those who maintained a GPA of less than 3.00.

Though the research study concluded that there is no evidence that participating in orientation for first-time online students increases the chances of succeeding in the first online course, it is highly recommended that Hopkinsville Community College should consider making it a requirement for all first-time online students to participate in the online orientation. This recommendation is based on the overwhelming support for orientation by researchers whose works were explored in the Literature Review chapter of this research. Wojciechowski and Palmer (2005) conducted a research study at a small rural community college in western Michigan to determine if there was any significant relationship between the first-time online students who participated in an orientation and those who did not. Seventy-three percent of the 107 who participated in the orientation passed their courses with a C grade or better and only 13.6% of the 17 who did participate passed. In a qualitative study that was conducted at North Carolina State University, 20% of the 29 participants who were enrolled in online courses and who responded to the survey, indicated that if it were available, they would have taken a course that addressed topics like what to expect in an online course prior to enrolling in their first online course (Bozarth, Chapman, & LaMonica, 2004).

First-time online students in the Fundamental Computer Application course at Macon State College, Georgia, are required to attend an initial class meeting or orientation during which they meet the instructors and other students, and they also have the opportunity to ask questions. They are also told about hardware and software requirements, and informed of the course expectations and the importance of being self-directed.

Orientation activities can be offered at any time between the enrollment period and the beginning of the class. The format for the orientation activities may include in-class sessions, remote training, or any combination thereof, but, the most important thing about orientation

programs is that they make it easy to avoid delays or frustrations that may be caused by inexperience with the new media used for the instruction, and orientation will prepare the participating students for the courses before the actual start date (Scagnoli, 2001).

Almost all the 31 students who participated in the orientation were very engaged in discussing the importance of the orientation during the follow-up phone interview. Many of them said something to the effect that even though the two online videos were simply part of the orientation, it was not until towards the end of the semester that they realized how helpful the videos were in preparing them for the online courses. Also, having all first-time online students participate in online orientation and taking both the *McVay Student Readiness Assessment* test and the *McVay Student Technology Experience Assessment* test will make some students realize that they are not ready for online classes. This will give such students an opportunity to switch to the in-class version of the same course.

Because dropping out often has negative implications, many of the colleges now use orientation programs as intervention strategies to help reduce attrition rates among their online students (Brawer, 1996). In addition to providing students the opportunity to experience a simulated online learning environment, orientation can facilitate academic and social interaction, increase student involvement, enhance the sense of belonging to a virtual learning community, and help with retention (Robinson, Burns, & Gaw, 1996).

Kanuka and Jugdev (2006) examined the impact of orientation on students who were getting ready for their first online course. Their findings indicated that intervention before the course (orientation) could increase confidence, academic skills, and time management skills. Athabasca University (Canada) in the 10th anniversary of their online MBA program revealed the helpful practices that helped make their program so successful. Through orientation, students

can determine if the online course is the right fit for them even before enrolling in the course (Harrell, 2008). Participating in the orientation will give prospective online students the opportunity to watch streaming videos of various instructors as they separate the myths from the facts about online courses, and the opportunity to do self-evaluation tests that will help them determine if they are ready for the online learning environment. According to Harrell (2008), orientation gives prospective online students experiences that mimic online courses, which in turn, helps students determine if the online environment is the right fit for them.

Since only the online students who participated in the orientation completed the survey questionnaire and responded to the follow-up phone survey were actively involved in the study, it is recommended that additional research studies that actively involve those selected to participate be conducted. It is also recommended that the research study address the issues that pertain to students who withdraw from their classes for personal and financial reasons. Since this research study focused primarily on the students of Hopkinsville Community College, it is also recommended that more research studies be conducted to determine if the same results can be replicated and generalized across different online student populations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

E-Mail Solicitation Request

From: Reginald Akpom
Subject: Research Request

Dear HCC Student:

I am a graduate student in the Department of Workforce Education and Development (WED) at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

Your e-mail address was obtained from the Administration Office at Hopkinsville Community College. A blind copy format will be used so that the list of recipients will not appear in the header.

The purpose of the enclosed survey is to give me a general idea how important online video orientation is for first online students at HCC.

You were selected to participate in this study because your academic records at HCC indicate that you are taking an online course for the first time.

The survey will take 20 minutes to 30 minutes to complete. All your responses will be kept confidential within reasonable limits. Only people directly involved with this project will have access to the surveys.

Completion and return of this survey indicate voluntary consent to participate in this study. Questions about this study can be directed to me or to my supervising professor, Dr. Beth Freeburg, Department of WED, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901
Phone (618) 453-3321.

You may inform me that you wish to opt out if you do not intend to participate or continue in the project. On the other hand, if you have not opted out and have not responded to this survey, you will be contacted again with this request 2 times during the next 1 week. You may also be called for a follow-up short interview should the need arise.

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in this research.

Name: Reginald Akpom
Phone number: 270-484-2570
E-mail: reginald.akpom@kctcs.edu

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453-4533. E-mail: siuhsc@siu.edu

Appendix B

The McVay instrument for gauging student readiness level

Questionnaire: Student Self-Evaluation Checklist

1. I am able to easily access the Internet as needed for my studies.
    A. Rarely
    B. Sometimes
    C. Most of the Time
    D. All of the Time

My response is: _____

2. I am comfortable communicating with others over the Internet.
    A. Rarely
    B. Sometimes
    C. Most of the Time
    D. All of the Time

My response is: _____

3. I am willing to communicate actively with my classmates and instructors electronically.
    A. Rarely
    B. Sometimes
    C. Most of the Time
    D. All of the Time

My response is: _____

4. I am willing to set aside an amount of time each week to effectively engage in study.
    A. Rarely
    B. Sometimes
    C. Most of the Time
    D. All of the Time

My response is: _____

5. I feel that online learning is of at least equal quality to traditional classroom learning.
    A. Rarely
    B. Sometimes
    C. Most of the Time
    D. All of the Time

My response is: _____

6. I feel that using my background and experience in my studies will be beneficial to new learning.
    A. Rarely
    B. Sometimes
    C. Most of the Time
    D. All of the Time

My response is: _____

7. I am comfortable with online written communication.
    A. Rarely
    B. Sometimes
    C. Most of the Time
    D. All of the Time

My response is: _____

8. When it comes to learning and studying, I am a self-directed person.
    A. Rarely
    B. Sometimes
    C. Most of the Time
    D. All of the Time

My response is: _____

9. Reviewing what I have learned in a course helps me with new learning.
    A. Rarely
    B. Sometimes
    C. Most of the Time
    D. All of the Time

My response is: _____

10. In my studies I am self-disciplined and find it easy to set aside reading and homework time.
    A. Rarely
    B. Sometimes
    C. Most of the Time
    D. All of the Time

My response is: _____

11. I am able to manage my study time effectively and easily complete assignments on time.
    A. Rarely
    B. Sometimes
    C. Most of the Time
    D. All of the Time

My response is: _____

12. As a student, I enjoy working by myself with minimal support or interaction.
    A. Rarely
    B. Sometimes
    C. Most of the Time
    D. All of the Time

My response is: _____

13. In my studies I set goals and have a high degree of initiative.
    A. Rarely
    B. Sometimes
    C. Most of the Time
    D. All of the Time

My response is: _____

14. I believe I am the only one responsible for my learning.
    A. Rarely
    B. Sometimes
    C. Most of the Time
    D. All of the Time

My response is: _____

Appendix C

The McVay instrument for gauging student technology experience

Questionnaire: Survey of Student Technology Experience

1. I have used computer for more than one year.
   A. Yes
   B. No

My response is: _____

2. I use a computer every day.
   A. Yes
   B. No

My response is: _____

3. When I have problem with my computer I usually fix it.
   A. Yes
   B. No

My response is: _____

4. When I have problem with my computer, I have someone I can call to fix it within 24 hours.
   A. Yes
   B. No

My response is: _____

5. I use word processing program daily.
   A. Yes
   B. No

My response is: _____

6. I know how to print a document from any word processing program.
   A. Yes
   B. No

My response is: _____

7. I have created several documents that exceed ten pages in any word processing program.
   A. Yes
   B. No

My response is: _____

8. I know how to set margins in my word processing program.
   A. Yes
   B. No

My response is: _____

10. I know how paginate (set page numbering) and set headers and footers in my word processing program.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

11. I know how to save any word processing file as an RTF file.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

12. I know how to save any word processing file as an HTML file.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

13. I use an internet e-mail program every day.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

14. I know how to set up and use an address list or address book in my e-mail program.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

15. I correspond, via e-mail, with more than 5 people on a regular basis.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

16. I have sent an attached document with e-mail.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

17. I have sent an attached picture or graphic with e-mail.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

18. I know how to access web pages via their web page address (URL).
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

19. I know how to use a search engine (e.g., Yahoo or AltaVista) to find information on the internet.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

20. On several occasions I have used the internet to research important information.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

21. I am familiar with electronic database.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

22. I have used electronic library resources (e.g., FirstSearch, InfoTrac, ProQuest, NTDB, etc.) to research a paper.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

23. I easily follow "hot links" from one web page to another.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

24. I am able to navigate backward and forward among many web pages.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

25. I know how to print web pages from the internet.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

26. I know how to navigate and within web frames.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

27. I have taken surveys or answered questionnaires on the internet.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

28. I have created more than three presentations using a graphical presentation program.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

29. I use Microsoft PowerPoint (or an equivalent program) on a regular basis.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

30. I have saved a presentation in HTML format.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

31. I have created web pages using an HTML editor (e.g., Netscape Composer, Microsoft FrontPage, Dreamweaver, etc.).
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

32. I have posted pages on the World Wide Web and made them accessible to others.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

33. I know how to subscribe to a list-serve or a newsgroup.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

34. I participate in two or more list-serves or newsgroups.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

35. I know how to access a bulletin board.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

36. I frequently post comments to two or more bulletin boards.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

37. I know how to access different chat rooms on the web.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

38. I know how to speak privately to an individual while on a community chat.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

39. I actively participate in one or more chat rooms.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

40. I have shared data in "real-time" through the use of a whiteboard or other shared recourses across the internet.
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

41. I have used a desktop videoconferencing product to contact another person (e.g., NetMeeting, CU-SeeMe, etc.).
    A. Yes
    B. No
My response is: _____

Appendix D

SAMPLE CONSENT FOR A/V TAPING
(Signatures of participants required)

Consent to Participate in Research

I_____(participant), agree to participate in this research project conducted by Reginald Akpom, doctoral student of Workforce Education and Development (WED) at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

I understand the purpose of this study is investigating the impact of orientation of students who are taking online courses for the first time at Hopkinsville Community College.

I understand my participation is strictly voluntary and may refuse to answer any question without penalty. I am also informed that my participation will last 30 minutes.

I understand that my responses to the questions will be audiotaped, and that these tapes will be transcribed and kept for (120 days) in a locked file cabinet. Afterward, these tapes will be destroyed.

I understand questions or concerns about this study are to be directed to me, Reginald Akpom, Phone: (270) 484-2570, learncad@bellsouth.net or my advisor, Dr. Beth W. Freeburg, Professor & Chair Department of Workforce Education and Development, Phone: (618) 453-3321, E-mail: freeburg@siu.edu.

I have read the information above and any questions I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity and know my responses will be tape recorded. I understand a copy of this form will be made available to me for the relevant information and phone numbers.

"I agree _ I disagree _ to have my responses recorded on audio/video tape."

"I agree_ I disagree _ that (researcher name) may quote me in his/her paper."

Participant signature and date

This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Sponsored Projects Administration, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709. Phone (618) 453 4533. Email:siuhsc@siu.edu.

Appendix E

In-Depth Interview Questions

Questions	Prompts
1. What were the parts of the course that made it easy to follow and complete assignments?	Please identify the things that made it easy for you to understand the instructions that helped you accomplish the tasks successfully.
2. What challenges did you encounter before and during the online course?	Please identify the challenges that you encountered before and during the process of taking the online course.
3. Was the online course format effective?	In what ways was it effective?
4. What aspects of the online course format were not effective?	In what ways was it not effective?
5. What corrective actions would you suggest for the aspects that were not effective?	What would you have done if you were the instructor?
6. Overall, what are your reflections on the course content?	Tell me about how you feel about the online courses.
7. How relevant was the orientation to the course format and course content?	Did the orientation help in any way to make you feel at home in the online class?

Appendix F

Interview Transcript for Ms. M:

Ms. M is a 19 year old female student who is working towards associate in science degree and hopes to transfer to University of Kentucky to study veterinary medicine. She did not participate in the online orientation, but she passed the course with a "B" grade.

Me: Hi Ms. M, I want to welcome you to this interview, and this is to confirm that you read through the consent form to participate in this research and you are signing it because you are willing to do it.

Ms. M: Yes, I really want to do it.

Me: Even though the interview questions are based on your experience in the online biology class 112 class you took, you are welcome to share the experience beyond just 112.

Ms. M: Ok, I will.

Me: Let's go ahead and get started.

Ms. M: Ok

Me: What were the parts of the course that made it easy to follow and complete assignments? In other words, if you can identify the things that made it easy for you to understand the instructions that helped you accomplish the tasks successfully.

Ms. M: Well ehm, well he gave us, pretty much it has like weekly things for us to do like we knew what section for us to go over, it was like really organized out into like this week or this month is you read this unit and complete this quiz, and read this tutorial. It was really organized. It was kind of complicated though because it was online but we did have a book. So we were supposed to be reading the book but then the materials that he wanted us to go over for the test that we had to take at the end of it was like a whole lot more online plus we

had like five or six pages that we had to go through, and it was pretty much just summarize, and that was what made the information hard to understand by having to read out of the book. Also, I kind of know when to set aside some time to do my school work. Through my week, I say this when I am going to do Biology, and this day is when I am going to do this part of it. It is kind of how I do my whole class schedule.

Me: What challenges did you encounter before and during the online course?

Ms. M: Em always Black Board, because a couple of times I was taking a quiz and they might not have always been timed but they are pretty long quizzes, 65-70 answer questions and you have to struggle to get it done, make sure you know the information and get the answers in. If I was taking it here or at home, Blackboard can always stop working, or just go out, pages not responding. So I have to stop and I have to call them to reset the quiz. Even though Blackboard disrupted it, it will still conclude that I didn't finish it, and that will be the final score.

Me: Was the online course format effective? And it was, how so?

Ms. M: Well actually at first, I wasn't sure because that one was my first online class. I had never taken one before. I like the fact that you don't have to go to class and it gives you that time to do it at home but that one is Biology. It was really hard to understand how a critical course like Biology can be taken online. And I was like, maybe online classes aren't for me or maybe, I don't like them. But after the semester I realized that I absolutely love online classes. So overall, I think it is effective.

Me: What aspects of the online course format were not effective?

Ms. M: Eehmm, in the quizzes, the way Black Board is, if you submit something and the internet goes out or disaster happens, it automatically puts it into your grade book. I don't

really like that. I will rather me do it, the teacher look at it online and then, put it in the grade book.

Me: What corrective actions would you suggest for the aspects that were not effective?

Ms. M: When doing my work and if I had any problem that needed immediate attention, I had to e-mail him. One thing that I could not understand was why it usually took a long time for the online instructor to respond to my questions in timely manner, since the teacher's responses were integral to her performance in the assignments and quizzes. I wish that it could be like the teacher will be there at a certain time when the teacher will set aside just to be there so that students can instant message him.

Me: Overall, what are your reflections on the course content? Or tell me about how you feel about the online courses.

Ms. M: I definitely learned information through the reading and quiz answers. But honestly as far as being effective, I would have rather in that particular class, like a person standing in front of me teaching it to me. That way I can ask questions, and he can draw me out pictures because I am kind of a visual learner. In that class, it will be more helpful to see him in person teaching it to me.

I have to admit that one my reasons for wanting to take an online class was that I do not have to go to class, but at same time, I realized that this is no ordinary class. It is a science course and that scared me in the sense that I have to do well in so that I can be accepted at UK (University of Kentucky). I was apprehensive about taking an online class, but when the semester started I was relieved that the instructor organized the course in such way that the students knew what chapters they had to study for every week of the semester.

That does not necessarily mean that it was easy. We had lots and lots of pages to study as we prepared for the tests. Luckily for me, I learned to be organized since I was a kid, and that helped me stay focused. There was no challenge as such, except that once in a while the Black Board went down when I was in the middle of a test. I had to call the IT people to reset the quiz. If I did not call them, the system will record that I not take the quiz.

Overall, the course format was effective. For one thing, I passed the course, and I liked it so much that I look forward to taking online classes whenever I have the opportunity. There is one thing though that I do not particularly like about online classes – The quizzes are graded by the book publishers and then the results are sent to the professor. I wish instructor would grade them so that he can tell me exactly why I got something wrong, instead of that it is wrong. I hope you don't get me wrong, but even though I have learned to like taking online classes, but at the bottom of my heart, I will rather be in a class and have somebody teaching me because I am a visual learner.

Me: Thank you Ms. M for participating in this interview.

Ms. M: Most definitely, I am glad to help.

Interview Transcript for Mr. J:

Mr. J, a 44 year old male student is majoring in one of the technical programs that are offered at Hopkinsville Community College. He hopes to transfer to Murray State University to study for his bachelor's degree in engineering technology. He participated in the online orientation and passed the course with an "A" grade.

Me: Hi Mr. J, I want to welcome you to this interview, and this is to ensure that you read through the consent form required.

Mr. J: Yes, I really want to do it.

Me: Even though the interview questions are based on your experience in your first college online course, you are welcome to share the experience beyond that course.

Mr. J: Sure.

Me: What were the parts of the course that made it easy to follow and complete assignments? In other words, if you can identify the things that made it easy for you to understand the instructions that helped you accomplish the tasks successfully.

Mr. J: Eehm, it was all laid out really well. The instructor communicated with us well. She seems to be really organized, and she just laid it out really well. Very understandable what we are supposed to do, what the work was, and she had like a list of when everything was supposed to be completed, and so it is really easy to stay on track.

Me: What challenges did you encounter before and during the online course?

Mr. J: Eehm. In that particular class, I have been using computers for a long time, I had an advantage probably over what most people will have. The only real challenge that I had was my internet connection would go south on me sometimes.

Me: Was the online course format effective? And if it was, how so?

Mr. J: The online is, I really like how it is laid out. For that particular course, I think online courses are very effective probably because I am experienced in computers prior to taking that online course.

Me: What aspects of the online course format were not effective?

Mr. J: Eehm. Online classes are good but as far as comparing to an actual class, I don't think you can really replace the face-to-face, human interaction, classes where I have to use machine – you can't replace that online. it is easy to get distracted, like am working at home

or at a coffee shop or something like that, there are a lot of other thing going on around me whereas if were to come to a class I would be insulated because those thing will not be allowed in class.

Me: What corrective actions would you suggest for the aspects that were not effective?

Mr. J: I think, maybe, actually nothing. I can't think of anything. As an older student, I have about enough life experience to know when to stop everything and do my online school work, and not to wait until close to the deadline. Heck, I was more worried about my internet failing me at the worst possible time because I live in a remote area where internet reception is really weak.

Me: Overall, what are your reflections on the course content? Or tell me about how you feel about the online courses.

Mr. J: All my thoughts and reflections about online classes are good and positive. At the same time, I can think of what to tell students who want to online classes for the first time if I could. I will students about the discipline to set things aside and make sure you have a plan as to when you are going to your work.

I have always been organized in my ways, and that made me feel that I can do well in online classes. I am also glad that the instructor in my first online class was also well organized too. He provided a list of what to do and when they were due.

The only real problem that I encountered in during my first online course was the internet was always down because I live in a rural area. Also, as much as you try, there is always distraction when I had to go the fridge. At times to avoid those distractions, I had to study in the local coffee shop that has a WIFI. And I get distracted there too. I guess, those are the sacrifices you have to make if you really want to pass the course.

I watched a video about taking online classes and filled out the survey sheet, but honestly, it wasn't of much help because I have already known that in order to pass an online course, you have to be well disciplined to know when to stop everything and do your school work. This is what always I tell my daughter, and I am glad she is listening. Anyway, I think the video about getting prepared for online course will be relevant to young students who are in the process of discovering themselves.

Me: Once again, thank you Mr. J for participating in this interview.

Mr. J: My pleasure. You are welcome.

Interview Transcript for Mr. C:

Mr. C is an 18 year old student working on his Associate in Science degree. He did not participate in the orientation. He hopes to transfer to either Murray State University or Western Kentucky University for his bachelor's degree program. For now, he does not know what he will major in when goes to a four-year college.

Me: Hi Mr. C, I want to thank you again for agreeing to interview with me on this project, and I want to emphasize that you have read the consent form, and you agree to sign it to show that you are doing this in your own free will.

Mr. C: Yes, I really want to do it.

Me: Even though the interview questions are based on your experience in your first college online course, you are welcome to share the experience beyond that course.

Mr. C: Sure.

Me: What were the parts of the course that made it easy to follow and complete assignments? In other words, if you can identify the things that made it easy for you to understand the instructions that helped you accomplish the tasks successfully.

Mr. C: What made it easy is that they had the whole semester planned out from the beginning and they had all when your homework was due, the day of the test ahead of time. Like say, I had to go somewhere and I didn't know if I was going to be near a computer I can get my homework done ahead of time. I had access to do it.

Me: What challenges did you encounter before and during the online course?

Mr. C: Eehm. That I had to learn on my own, I don't have the instructor helping me personally, I had to watch videos, read notes, and look into the text book on my own.

Me (still on the same subject): Did you wish it was different?

Mr. C: Not really, I enjoyed it, I did.

Me: (trying to be sensitive because he did not succeed in the course): Do think taking it online was as effective as it would have been if you took it in class, keeping in mind that unfortunately you withdrew from the course?

Mr. C: I withdrew from all of them. I had surgeries. It is better online though.

Me: So your surgeries were your primary reason for withdrawing, not because you couldn't do it, but first things first.

Mr. C: I had to take that decision.

Me: So outside of that, you said the online format was effective? How was it effective?

Mr. C: According to my schedule, I would not be home for three or four days at a time till later that night. The days that I was home, I was able to get my classes done, get the homework started out, and study for the test. Everything was just a lot smoother than having to travel to school.

Me: What corrective actions would you suggest for the aspects that were not effective?

Mr. C: Mmm you don't have the instructor to help you with it. You have to learn on your own. I will suggest more instructional videos to help people who will not be able to learn very well on their own, try to give them a guideline through it.

Me: Overall, what are your reflections on the course content? Or tell me about how you feel about the online courses.

Mr. C: Overall, I like everything about online classes despite my mishap from last semester. This semester, I am not working, I will be working next semester. I am looking forward to continue taking my classes online next semester.

I really like everything about online courses because I like to learn at my own pace without the help of the teacher. I have always liked to read since I was a kid. Also, I can work full-time, and still have time to do my school work at night.

If there is one thing that I don't like about online courses, it is that students are left to do all the work. Don't get me wrong, I like to read, but there are at times when you need to talk to the instructor but they are not available. It will even be better if they have videos to teach in the internet.

Me: Looks like we have concluded this interview, I want to thank you Mr. C for working with me on this interview.

Mr. C: Very welcome. Thank you.

Interview Transcript for Mr. D:

Mr. D, an 18 year old student working on his associate in science degree participated in the online orientation but did not pass the course. He hopes to transfer to either Murray State University or Austin Peay State University or Western Kentucky University for his bachelor's degree program. Just like Mr. C, for now, he does not know what he will major in when goes to

a four-year college. Mr. D scored a "D" in the course. After the interview, it occurred to me that Mr. D sounded cheerful for someone who scored a "D" in the course. Then I remembered that technically a "D" is a passing grade, but the course will not transfer to a four-year college, should he wish to pursue his bachelor's in science degree in the future.

Me: OK Mr. D, I want to thank you for participating in this interview, and I have read all your rights including that you can terminate the interview at any time

Mr. D: Yes.

Me: What were the parts of the course that made it easy to follow and complete assignments? In other words, if you can identify the things that made it easy for you to understand the instructions that helped you accomplish the tasks successfully.

Mr. D: Eeh, it made it easy for me because I can take my own time, as in working on my own schedule. For instance, I found a job and as such, I could do my school work after I came back from work.

Me: What challenges did you encounter before and during the online course?

Mr. D: Eeh interactions with the teacher if I needed help. They did not always respond to me as promptly as I wanted.

Me: Was the online course format effective?

Mr. D: Not as effective as I would like it to be. I think the in-class class is more effective because of the interaction I get with the teacher. I get a one-on-one interaction with the teacher, which I did not get in my online class. I get a one-on-one interaction with the teacher, which I did not get in my online class.

Me: What aspects of the online course format were not effective?

Mr. D: Except for the lack of interaction with the teachers, I think everything about the online class was effective.

Me: What corrective actions would you suggest for the aspects that were not effective?

Mr. D: As I said, except for the lack of interaction with the teachers, I think everything about the online class was effective.

Me: Overall, what are your reflections on the course content? Or tell me about how you feel about the online courses.

Mr. D: The content was pretty easy, it was self-explanatory. I just wish the teachers responded to my e-mails more promptly that they did.

I like everything about online courses, and I will continue to take them whenever I can. I can be working as I take online classes. The only thing that I don't like about online classes is that the teachers are not always there when you need them, and when you send them e-mail it takes a long time to get reply from them.

Mr. D went on to say that he prefers in-class course to online courses because he does better in one-on-one situations. "At first I was not sure what to expect in an online class, but the video that we watched before the beginning of the semester helped me to be prepared."

Me: Look like we concluded this interview, and I want to thank you for participating in it.

Mr. D. Mm-h.

Appendix G

PEARSON ALWAYS LEARNING

Request for Permission to Use Pearson Higher Education Content For Classroom Use in Print and/or Electronic Format

To:	Pearson Permissions Department
Recipient Fax No:	
Requester's Name:	
School/Company Affiliation:	
Full Mailing Address:	
Email Address:	
Office Phone:	
Fax:	
Your Ref. #:	

Requesting on Behalf of-Name & Address:	
Instructor's Name:	
Full School Mailing Address:	
Email Address:	
Fax:	
Course Name:	
Semester:	
Number of Students:	

PEARSON TITLE INFORMATION

Title:	How to be a Successful Distance Learning Student
Author:	Marguerita McVay
ISBN (must be provided in order to process your request):	0-536-60288-3
Requested Content: Including pages, illustration and figure numbers, charts, photographs and the pages on which they appear:	Page 7 - Student Self-Evaluation Checklist. Pages 8 and 9 - Survey of Student Technology Experience .
Is the textbook adopted for the class?	No

REQUESTED USE INFORMATION

How content will be used: I.e. classroom handout, coursepack, print and/or electronic formats?	☐	Classroom handout
	☐	Coursepack
	☐	Print
	☑	Electronic
	☐	Other (Please specify)
User Type: I.e. enrolled students, on campus students, other?	☑	Enrolled students
	☐	On campus students
	☐	Other (Please specify)

PEARSON

For Electronic Usage: ☑ Yes ☐ No
Specify electronic format required:

URL Address where content will appear:

Specify if Website will be Hosted by a Third Party (i.e. WebCT, Blackboard)? Black Board

Number of Persons Who Will Access Online: 31
Only students who are enrolled in the college classes will be able to access it.

If on-line, will access to the information be restricted and Password Protected? How?
If on-line, will downloading, printing copying be restricted? How? No

What will be the Post and Take-Down Dates? Post 20 April- Take-Down 5 May '10

Will the Pearson Textbook be Adopted and Students Required to Purchase the Text or Product *for* the Course? No

Additional Comments/Information:

Associate Professor and Program Coordinator for CAD.

Hi Reginald,

Pearson Learning Solutions hereby grants you permission to use three pages (7, 8 and 9), including the findings therein, from our title *How to be a Successful Distance Student* by Marguerita McVay (ISBN 0536602883) in your doctoral dissertation, to be posted on Black Board, from April 20, 2013 to May 5, 2013, as well as in your research study.

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Dissertation Title:

Investigating the Impact of Orientation and Detected Characteristics of First-Time Online Students on Their Success Rate in a Community College Setting

Major Professor: Dr. Beth Freeburg, Chair